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STORIES

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by LOSELLE GILMAN

DANGER DIMENSION

by STANLEY MULLEN

AND OTHERS

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WONDER WHERE HE LIVES



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I ALWAYS USE THEM. THEY'RE PLENTY KEEN



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THIN AND CERTAINLY HANDSOME



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SUPER SCIENCE STORIES

READ IT TODAY—LIVE IT TOMORROW!

VOL. 8

APRIL, 1951

NO. 1

TWO NOVELETTES

- THE DEATH STAR** Fox B. Holden 14
At last he found it, this lost little Earthman doomed by the stars—a world that fulfilled all man's dreams—save the one without which he must die!
- DANGER DIMENSION** Stanley Mullen 38
Through that black portal they went—the advance guard of Earth's last chaos...

STORIES OF TOMORROW

- THE LAST DARK** La Salle Gilman 28
Only flaming destruction remained for Earth, the day the final struggle began between the men who thought they were the planet's alms—and the tiny group who could prove they were!
- HIGH FLIGHT** Katherine MacLean 60
Alone he braved the terrors of the unknown, planted the first human foot-print on the ageless surface of the moon... came back to tell the waiting Earth about it—and no one believed him!
- ETERNAL EARTHLING** Walter Kublius 69
No man could cross that sinister barrier without meeting the brain that had conceived it—a solid wall, made out of time itself!
- THE UNFINISHED** Frank Belknap Long 79
Star-riding conqueror of the universe—and slave of the little green hell writhed from a galaxy that cursed his birth... they battled to death over one little question: Who is Men?
- CHILD OF THE GREEN LIGHT** Leigh Brackett 86
Between sun and space, a gallant little band fought to pierce the dread secret of Mercury's orbit—that the human race might endure!

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DEPARTMENTS AND FEATURES

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Cover by Lawrence

Inside Illustrations by Savage, Finlay, Van Dongen, Bok and Lawrence

Any resemblance between any character appearing in fictional matter, and any person, living or dead, is entirely coincidental and unintentional.

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FANDOM'S CORNER

Conducted by James V. Taurasi

THE 8th World Science Fiction Convention was held over the Labor Day holiday at Portland, Oregon, and all reports show that it was the best yet. Most reports state that about 375 persons visited the convention. Among those present were such well-known personalities as E. E. (Skylark) Smith, Anthony Boucher, Bea Mahaffey, Rog Phillips, Poul Anderson, Bob Tucker, Forrest J. Ackerman, and Howard Browne. As usual, most of the expenses were paid by the auction. Many sf magazines and book editors and publishers donated their original covers and interior illustrations to do their part in aiding the convention. *Super Science Stories* as well as its sister magazines, *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* and *Fantastic Novels*, were well represented by cover and numerous interior illustrations. Science-fiction books, magazines, fan-mags, movies and radio were discussed, and one of the year's finest sf movies, "Destination Moon," was seen as part of the program. One of the unusual features of the program

(Continued on page 8)

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SUPER SCIENCE STORIES

(Continued from page 8)

"dues" is a subscription to "Bizarre" which is 50¢ a year (75¢ to non-members). For more details write to Tom Covington, 315 Dawson Street, Wilmington, North Carolina. Tom, by the way, needs material for "Bizarre", so if you can draw or write, check with him.

Super Science Stories, now has two British editions coming out in England. Another British firm has decided to publish it there and their issue No. 1 reprints the cover and some of the stories from the April 1949 American edition. It is the same size as the US edition, but only 64 pages, good paper and trimmed edges. A real neat job.

Now for this month's fan magazines:

CURRENT SCIENCE FICTION, No. 1, published 60 times a year by New Enterprise Publications, P. O. Box 83, Gravesend Station, Brooklyn, New York, 5¢ a copy. This is a revival of the short-lived "Science Fiction Weekly", and is edited by Ron Lyons, 4 pages, poorly mimeographed, mostly fan news. Our suggestions are that they do a little better with the mimeograph and format, and shorter editorials, please! By the way this amateur publishing company plans to issue 17 different fan magazines! That's a lot of mags from one outfit. We wish them luck.

FANTASY ADVERTISER, November 1950, published bi-monthly at 1745 Kenneth Road, Glendale 1, California. 15¢ a copy. Still the top-notch advertising fan mag, neatly photo-offset, interesting book reviews, articles, illustrations and, most important, the ads. Try a copy.

STEF CARD, No. 9, published weekly by Walter A. Coslet, Box 6, Helena, Montana. 20 for 50¢. This is a fan mag on the back of a post-card. Every week it brings you headline news on the fan and pro field.

(Continued on page 12)

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SUPER SCIENCE STORIES

(Continued from page 10)

Hectographed, but neat. The editor does an excellent job. We suggest you write to him for a sample copy.

1950 FAN DIRECTORY, Edited by Leonard Moffatt and published jointly by The Fantasy Foundation and The National Fantasy Fan Federation. A neatly printed booklet listing by states and country 404 names and address of fans; cross indexed; and also list what organization they belong to. A fine looking job and well worth the 25¢ asked for a copy. Write to Roy Lavender, Sec. NFFF, Box 132, Delaware, Ohio.

FAN-FARE, November 1950, published bi-monthly by W. Paul Ganley, 119 Ward Rd., N. Tonawanda, New York. 15¢ a copy. The leading fan-fiction magazine that has been improving right along from the first issue. Now its including illustrations for the stories, a needed improvement. This fan mag contains mostly fiction, a few poems and features, neatly mimeographed. Cover this time is not bad. By all means try a copy.

FANTASY-TIMES, No. 119, published semi-monthly by Fandom House, c/o James V. Taurasi, 137-03 32nd Avenue Flushing, New York, 10¢ a copy. The oldest fan mag still being published; now in its 10th year. News on the pros all over the world. This issue announces that *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* will include interior illustrations with its May 1951 issue.

Fan mags to be reviewed, club news, request for material for your fan mag and any news of interest to the fan, author and stl reader should be sent to Fandom's Corner, c/o Super Science Stories, Popular Publications, Inc., 205 E. 42nd Street, New York 17, New York. This is your column, keep us informed.

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and

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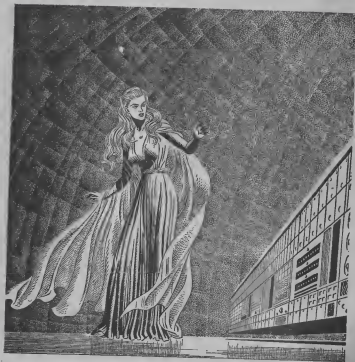
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The DEATH STAR

Alone he conquered his ultimate world, this lost little Earthman doomed by the stars—a world that fulfilled all man's dreams—save the one without which he must die!

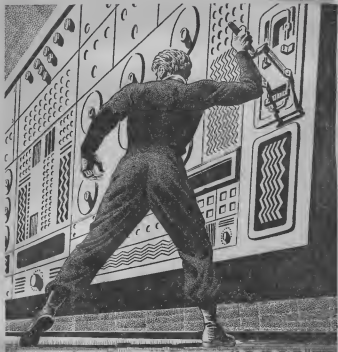
By FOX B. HOLDEN

CHAPTER ONE

Lost in the Void

DON'T call it perspiration—the word is sweat.

If you've got some on your forehead, okay. If you haven't, maybe this is for you more than the other guy—at least that's how I feel about it. Just my opinion.



I snapped over the biggest lever on the panel . . .

I'm nobody important; I'm not the type. If you want my star-map to Qyyiao when I'm finished, you can have it. But the pink tea will have to be on you.

My name is Joe Kosta, and I'm a Deep Space prospector. I'm no deadbeat—I've got enough money to pay my own freight, and I've earned it all myself. The hard way. I never hit a big strike in my life—not until Qyyiao.

It's true, what some of my fancy-pants friends in Venus City will tell you—I

could've quit Deep Space ten years ago and taken things easy on a Martian orchid-ranch for the rest of my life. Swimming pools, lawn chairs, and all that jetwash. You know.

But even when the power-pack on my suit quit halfway back to where my ore-lugger was circling in its orbit around the planetoid I'd just surveyed, I don't think I could've been sold on the idea that I was in the habit of hitting off more Deep Space than I could chew. Sure, Deep Space makes

oceans look like spilled tea in a saucer. But you don't just tiptoe into the edge of it. You grab it with both fists and kick like hell all the way out and all the way back again.

I had found an uncharted planetoid belt out there, and had singled out one big hunk in particular that looked good—gold, uranium, deutronium—but I hadn't even seen Qyylao until after I got in trouble. Like you do if you know your business, I figured out an orbit for the lugger, put on a suit equipped with an Omicron drive unit, and jumped out after my find.

It was a good find, all right. A heavy chunk of rock, loaded to its top strata with ore that was plenty rich in the kind of stuff I liked to trade in. The spectroscope in the observation bubble of my lugger hadn't lied to me. I figured from the preliminary survey I made, just walking around the thing and chipping off ore samples here and there, that I could fill my hull in maybe two months' time, and take back home about a half-million in gold and three times that in deutronium. Good find. Worth two cold months on canned air on a lonesome little chunk of rock in the middle of the biggest nowhere the Lord ever made.

Satisfied, I picked up the radar signal from the ship and computed a quick trajectory to it, and started driving back for the portable equipment. I was still accelerating when the Omicron and the radar quit.

If I'd've been a little closer, I could've met the ship on its way around just by drifting. Had that happen once before. But this time I was caught too far out, and I knew I stood to miss the ship, as it came around, by a good twenty miles. It might as well have been twenty million. I'd had enough acceleration to carry me out beyond the little planetoid's gravity field—if I hadn't, I'd've fallen back and broken my thick neck. The thing had no atmosphere envelope, so the chute-pack I carried for planets that did have would've been as

much use as an ice-cube in hell. I always pack a chute, though, because when you can use one, it saves the drive-unit on your suit a lot of wear and tear.

So, once beyond the grav-field, I just kept drifting, and when the ship came around again about an hour later, I guess I was a good seven or eight hundred miles away from it.

I had air for about twenty hours and good insulation in the suit. I wouldn't freeze.

Just suffocate after a while.

Well, as the old saying has it, there I was, a thousand miles up and flat on my back.

... The only thing bad about any spacesuit you buy is that in order to make any kind of repairs on the things—especially on the drive-units—you have to take 'em off, and then get going with your emergency repair kit. So I was stuck there, too.

I had a lot of time to try to think of some way out, and not much time to live if I didn't. And like those pals of mine who go vacationing on Venus all the time will tell you, I get a little far off the beaten path in my job. Far enough so that the nearest transport or freighter route was a good half light-year away. The only answer I got to the whole thing was that I was drifting at about eight hundred miles an hour straight out into noplac.

At a slow speed like that you hardly know you're moving. You wouldn't, if you didn't keep a close eye on familiar constellations, and even then it's damned near impossible to tell unless you're a pretty old hand at navigation in Deep Space. You get a little panicky, too—there's no bottom or top to anything—no real direction at all. Just you and a lot of stars, only you need to keep on breathing. It's sort of funny, too, and you get to laughing a little. There you are, trapped as neatly as a squirrel in a cage—without a thing holding you. And you have nothing to hold on to—except the emptiness of space.

I ADMIT it began to get me. Not just because I was going to die, but because there was nothing I could do. A man has to do something, even when he's on the way out. I was getting so bothered about it that I forgot to think about the possibilities in a planetoid belt. The little hunks of rock are usually separated only by a few thousand miles—not hundreds of thousands or millions as between planets in a regular system. I'd drifted maybe ten hours and never thought of it.

So I was surprised and even a little panicky when I felt my feet suddenly pressed against the soles of my boots. They say you can always tell when you're falling, and I could. Falling feet first, but I couldn't see toward what.

With the Omicron shot, I had no power to break the fall, so instead of having about ten more hours to live, it looked as though I'd be cashing in in a matter of seconds. I even resented having that much time taken away from me—but again, there was nothing to do. Just hit and splatter.

I didn't catch on until the shrill whistle around my heavy lead-lined helmet began to deepen to a soft roar. What I was able to see below me by that time was nothing but a barren, jagged gray wasteland like any other planetoid—who'd think it still had an atmosphere?

It wasn't a big hunk—maybe a thousand miles in diameter at most. But it had a gravity like Earth's, so I knew it was another of the "heavy" planetoids like the one I'd surveyed, and probably loaded with all the uranium and deuterium a man could ask for. Heavy, so it had kept an atmosphere long after it had become too barren to support even a scrubby vegetation.

But I didn't have much time, because the envelope was probably less than fifty miles thick. I waited until the dull roar around me subsided to a low moan, then I hauled up everything I had on the rip-cord of my chute.

And I got down in one piece without so

much as a stubbed toe to show for it.

I was still alive—to suffocate in ten hours. Unless, of course, that junk I'd chuted down through was breathable—and the chances, as always when you're in a jam with no way out, were plenty to one against that.

I laid flat on my back a while, just resting, figuring, and trying to get up the nerve to try an atmosphere test.

The planetoid was a barren mess; even the Pluto stonemoles wouldn't have had anything to do with it. There was a little light as there always is on these wanderers of Deep Space—light from countless thousands of far-off suns. A twilight, sort of, that makes you think you see what you don't, and doesn't show you the things you should.

But I know the outlines of a city when I see them.

If your granddad ever told you ghost stories when you were a kid, and described how haunted houses look in the light of the full moon, you'll have an idea of how the city looked. Dead—eerie, shadowed so you couldn't be sure how high the highest spire stood, or how far away the first building was. You just knew it was empty and hadn't echoed to voices or footsteps in a million years.

I thought about it, all the while trying to get up the nerve to open the testvalve in my helmet and sniff the stuff that this rock used for air.

I felt like a kid trying to muster enough guts to take his first jump from a high diving board.

At that point, you either do it or you don't. I opened the valve a quarter-turn, held my breath, and let some of the stuff mix with the canned air in my helmet. I turned it off, and then I took a breath.

The first whiff made me sneeze.

And the second and the third and so on from there—well, it smelled like an old basement that had been without plumbing for too long, but after I fooled with it for

half an hour, I knew I could breathe it and not even need smelling salts. And even better—it was warm!

Sometimes you get the breaks when you need 'em most. That thousand-to-one shot.

Why the stuff was warm—by that I mean about plus forty degrees Fahrenheit, which certainly is warm compared to what I expected—I don't know.

I didn't get the sleepy feeling until I was out of the suit and opening up the emergency tool kit. I was just getting the Omicron ready for a look at its trunk circuits when the Sand Man clubbed me good.

For no good reason under any sun there is, I was out like a busted jet before I could even start swinging.

WHEN I woke up they were all around me, quiet-like, and the place was as bright and warm as if it were swinging in the orbit of good old Earth herself. There was lush, lavender grass beneath me, and the landscape all around the spot on which I lay was thick with foliage in pastels more varied than even a Martian artist had ever caught on canvas. The sky ended in a pale green haze, and the low swell of a mountain chain on the horizon reflected a deep, burnished gold.

A warm breeze rippled the grass around me and caressed me as though I were its lover. It was an intoxicating breath, no more like the dank, stale stuff I'd breathed a while back than Venusian perfume is like the stink-weed of Uranus.

They were watching me, so I stood up. I had the curved butt of my ray-pistol caressing the palm of my hand just in case, my forefinger relaxed on its trigger.

The first thing they did when I stood up was laugh a little, and I thought it was at me and I wasn't in the mood for it. I drew the pistol just to let them know I meant business. The musical sound of their laughter stopped as though it has been on a transcriptograph and somebody pulled the

plug out. It was as sudden as that.

We exchanged stares. I was sure the laughter was still in their wide, gold-flecked eyes, but you can't shoot a woman for just laughing with her eyes. Not any woman as beautiful as they were.

I guess there were about a dozen of them ringed around me, all dressed in the same kind of shimmering, gauze-like stuff that they still won't let a gal wear back in Boston, on Earth.

Their voices were as beautiful and graceful as they were; I couldn't tell you the story without admitting that for a while, anyway, they had me believing in Utopia. They tried talking to me and when that didn't work out, I guess they telepathed. Whatever they did it worked, and when I talked back they seemed to understand all right.

I stuck the pistol back in its holster.

"What is this place?"

"Qyylao," came the soft, gently whispering thought in reply.

"All right. What was that lousy gray place I lit on first?"

"Qyylao," the reply came again.

I got a funny feeling up the back of my spine and caressed the pistol butt again. Because, in the distance, I could see the same outline of a city that I had seen before, and that it was the same city there couldn't have been a doubt. The same—only different, now. You could feel the life that was in it, just as you could see the beauty of its many-faceted alabaster columns, glittering like a huge polished diamond in sunlight that came out of nowhere.

"Things look different in daylight," I said. "Does the stone turn to grass every morning?"

The laughter again, but I didn't draw the pistol. I didn't think I'd need to, unless they began not answering questions.

"We will take you to our city, calloused one. And to the Garden of Dreams, and the Lake of Forgetfulness—"

"What's this *calloused* business? And how about explaining how you change scenes around here so fast? If I don't know where I am, dammit, I won't be able to find out where I've—uh, been. . ."

For two cents, I thought, I'd forget these Red Riding Hoods and go to work on my suit. But then they came a little closer, and the price went up two bits. It occurred to me that things weren't bad around here at that—maybe it wouldn't hurt to let the Omicron wait a while. . .

"Calloused?" the thought came in answer to my question. "The mark of a lesser being, who works to live! But we meant no offense, strong one. It is only that you—appealed to us, and so we let you see Qyyiao as it actually exists. It is perhaps no fault of your own that you have been a worker."

I didn't get sore, but maybe if I had right then both sides could have saved each other a lot of trouble. Instead, I tried to get a line on Qyyiao, both versions.

The tallest of the women stepped forward, and the fragrance of her mingled with that of the air I was breathing was almost enough to make me stop asking practical questions right there. If I'd've been built like anybody else, and if my pop hadn't been a pick-swinger from the old country, maybe I would've stopped. The look she had in her eyes was the real McCoy, not the jazzed-up version you get from the country-club set back home.

"Qyyiao," she told me slowly, "is bleak and dead to strangers, whom we do not wish to trespass. It is an illusion fostered by a device created by the last of our scientists, who lived uncountable eons ago, in a truly forgotten past. But even so far back, when our race was still chained by the fetters of daily toil, we had solved the many riddles of the mind. We wished, even then, no trespassing on our lovely sphere by—the wrong sort of people. . ."

Don't ask me why I swallowed that one. I guess that's when I really started slip-

ping. She kept explaining, and I kept trying to understand while sizing up the rest of the surroundings as matter-of-factly as possible. I slipped some more.

"The device our men of science perfected is merely a creator of illusions; an amplifier of thought-impulses electronically recorded on a series of vacuum grids, which functions perpetually to effect an instantaneous hypnosis for any intruder."

I could tell the way she said it that she didn't know a word of what she was talking about. It was as though the explanation, itself, had been recorded, ready for parroting when necessary.

"So your gadget makes chance intruders think they're busted in on a dead hunk of rock, not even worth a second look, is that it? They just get disgusted, and take right off again."

"Fundamentally, that is correct. And for many ages, it has not failed us."

"I can see how it wouldn't. But what I want to know is how come you let me in on your nice layout? How do I rate?"

She just laughed again.

And we started walking toward the beautiful city.

CHAPTER TWO

The City of Dreams

THE city wasn't half as far away as it looked. Or maybe the walk seemed short because of the company I was keeping. I knew they were communicating among themselves, but the only remarks addressed to me were from the blue-haired beauty that had spoken to me first. She seemed to have taken on the self-appointed job of guide, and I can't say that I minded. I suppose I was beginning to get ideas when a rather practical thought crossed my mind.

"Where," I asked as we entered the city's gold-laced gates, "are the men of this planet?"

"In the city," she said. "At sport, or in the garden or the lake, or perhaps in the Valley of Melody. They are very kind—they have always left to us the privilege of greeting acceptable strangers. Which is, after all, only just, because our lives were the more—that is, because—"

She didn't have that explanation down so pat, and I waited for her to get it ironed out. She didn't. She changed the subject. "First," she said, "we will show you our city. And then—"

"Just show me to a restaurant," I said. "I'd appreciate some solid chow. I've been on concentrates for Lord knows how long."

"You have not dined?"

"Not like the Romans used to, anyway. Pills." I showed her my half-filled tube of concentrates.

"Then, first, a banquet! Straightaway, in the Hall of Suns, there shall be a feast in honor of your presence on Qyylao!"

It was like so much magic. For all I knew, it could've been just that, but I had a hunch there was a lot more to it than skilled practice of the black arts.

The Hall of Suns was an open amphitheater, nestled in the heart of the glittering city. Perhaps three hundred yards in length and a third that in width, it reminded me of the old football bowls we used to have back on Earth, except that it would have made any old Grecian architect turn greener than a mildewed penny. The slender pillars that tapered upward to perfect points from their elliptical bases about the circumference of the ovalar "hall" must have given the place its name, for hanging in mid-air about a foot above their tips were, so help me, actual miniature suns. They coruscated with the blue-white beauty of a nova, and I reasoned that here was the first example I had even seen of the science of atomics turned to decorative use. But I was corrected.

"Decorative, of course," the tall woman at my shoulder said, "but without them, Qyylao would have neither heat nor light.

Their energy is so distributed that no one part of the entire planet receives a concentration of either in greater quantity than another."

"You mean your scientists just did away with the law of inverse squares? Those—" and I pointed to the six-foot diameter, two hundred foot high balls of fire which hung unmoving above the pillar tips—"heat and light the whole planet? *Both hemisphere, at once? Equally?*"

"Of course. We have reached perfection in all ways. It is why the Machine of Illusion is so necessary. Our world must never suffer contamination. . . ."

"You let me in, and I'm an old contaminator from way back," I reminded her again. "How come?"

And again, she only laughed.

The banquet appeared.

It wasn't served by magnificently-muscle slaves—it wasn't brought in by a noiseless procession of robots. It wasn't as far as I know prepared by anybody and it wasn't brought in to the fanfare of golden trumpets. It just *appeared*, that's all.

And one by one, the inhabitants of this perfect world began filling the Hall o' Suns. They were young-looking, tall, handsome men with bronze-colored flesh, and scores more of women each as dazzling in their beauty as the ones who had escorted me to this fantastic place. None of them were old, none were malformed; none less god-like in appearance than his fellow.

They had this perfection business down to a T.

While I ate the strange but superbly delicious foods that from time to time appeared before me, I kept asking questions. Jjora, for such was the tall girl's name, sat—or rather reclined—beside me at what was obviously the place of honor at my long, low, gently curving table.

"This isn't," I asked her, "just a dream, is it? I'm not laying out on a gray, stony plain, someplace, getting ready to die, am I?" I said it with a smile, so she'd know

I intended no offense with any of my questions, but as soon as I had said the words, a shadow of consternation danced across her eyes, but was gone almost before I had recognized it for what it was.

"Do you think you are sleeping?" was all she said. Not that it proved anything, but I gave myself a pinch. It hurt, and I was as satisfied as I was able to be.

"No," I said. "I couldn't dream up stuff this good anyway. When I dream, it's about finding a big strike and hauling it home with a whole fleet of luggers—"

"It is always of work that you think, isn't it?" she broke in.

"Work, and making a reasonably honest buck, sure. Why? Is work passé with your crowd? Don't those fellows—" and I gestured toward the scores of other tables at which the Apollo-like men were enjoying the feast with their women—"do anything to earn a living, or to keep a layout like this from getting mortgaged?"

"Our forebears made certain of all this for us," she said, with the faintest hint of surprise in her reply. "And now it is ours to use as we wish! Qyylao is too beautiful to be marred by toil, Joe."

I didn't remember telling her my first name, but she had it. I wondered what else she could pluck from my mind without my knowledge.

The men, I learned, spent their time at various kinds of sports, or just taking it easy, when, as, and how they wanted to. The women spent most of their time with the men. I could see the logic there.

But, just the same, the civilizations of yore had apparently done their work so well that their posterity not only had lived to reach an ultimate state of perfection, but once they got there, didn't even have to lift a finger to keep things that way.

Not bad, when I stopped to think about it. Not bad at all. Maybe if I played things smart, I could get these kids to take a real

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shine to me. . . . I thought about it.

Something gave a tug at the back of my mind, but I didn't get a good look at what it was because Jjora was thinking at me again.

"Now, if you are finished," she said, "you will be furnished with suitable attire. And then as you wish, you may sport with the others, or visit the Garden of Dreams, or swim with Jjora in the Lake of Forgetfulness."

I hadn't thought about being finished with the meal. I guess I must've eaten tons of stuff, because although I had a curious still-hungry feeling, at the same time I felt content and satisfied. I thought then that it was more habit than anything else that made me slip a couple of concentrate pills in my mouth. Perhaps it was. Or maybe it was because you can fool a man, but not his stomach.

HAND in hand, Jjora and I, followed leisurely by a few of the other women, wended our way through the fantastic blooms of the Garden of Dreams. Here, all consciousness was lost save for an awareness of the sheer joy of living with the fulfillment of all human desires at one's fingertips. Before this, my five senses had been buried somewhere deep in a black mire, never coming within light-years of the true wonderment that they reveled in here in the Garden. And the further we walked, the more I was sure I would never leave Qyyiao.

I knew without question that Jjora could be mine, and would be, if I did but ask. And somehow I knew, too, that on Qyyiao there was no such thing as death—only life; life, as a man should live it. Qyyiao was forever. A forever of idleness, beauty, and fulfilled desire.

As was the Garden of Dreams, so was the Valley of Melody, which took a man's soul and flung it free to the stars on the strains of music which came from nowhere, yet was a part of the very air he breathed.

And when we had finished swimming beneath the waters of the Lake of Forgetfulness, which I knew must stretch into infinity, for it could have neither beginning nor end in time, but was indeed as timeless as man's desire to shrug from his shoulders the burdens of care, worry, and responsibility, Jjora and I once again stood at the fringes of the great city, myself seeing as though for the first time the incomparable fantasy of its exquisite beauty.

"You will never leave Qyyiao, never leave Jjora. . . ."

It was more like a statement than a question.

"No," I said. "No."

Something was needling a part of my mind on which I had locked the door and thrown away the key. Jjora sensed it. Suddenly, I felt a vague nervousness, as though death itself were beside me disguised in some little thing. But I did not want to leave Qyyiao.

I saw the men playing at their sports; watched them dart about on a lush carpet of grass that had been sown by someone else.

I saw the women with their lovers in the shadowed alcoves of the towering, magnificent buildings, over which other men had labored.

I saw the men and the women, immortal, and increasing in their beauty and grace by the hour as they wallowed in the riches striven for by an aspiration and genius not their own.

And the tugging at my mind became a gnawing pain until I knew, somehow, what it was I wanted, although I did not know why.

"My spacesuit, Jjora," I heard myself saying. "My ray-pistol—"

"Why, after all the beautiful things I have shown you, must you think of such as those?" she asked gently.

"What's wrong with thinking of them?" I asked back.

"Surely you must know by now that they

are only reminders of the—the other life from which you came. They serve only as bonds with the colorless existence which was yours before."

"Are you trying to tell me you've destroyed my gun? My suit?"

"No, but—"

"But what?" I felt an old, familiar strength slipping back into my veins and my muscles, and all at once the air seemed a little too sweet.

"But perhaps your things are just being examined by some of the men resting from their games. We like new things, especially when they intrigue our fancies. When the men tire of examining your properties, they will be put aside, and—"

"My stuff is like a new toy to them, is that it?" I wasn't mad. After you've been through the Garden of Dreams, the Valley of Melody, and the Lake of Forgetfulness—after you've dined in the Hall of Suns and walked among the wonders of a city built by the architects of paradise, it's not easy to get sore at anything, and I wasn't quite able to. But quite suddenly there was a storm of feeling welling up from somewhere inside me that didn't fit in with the perfection of Qyylao, and which no Lake of Forgetfulness could make me deny.

"Maybe I'm a toy," I said. "Maybe that's why I was let in here—let to see your beautiful, perfect planet—your royal purple society—because I was something that 'intrigues your fancy'!"

"Joe—" She came close to me, but women have come close to me before.

"And what happens when you tire—am I to be put aside like my suit and my gun? Maybe I'll contaminate your pretty place, baby! Get me my suit and my gun. Or I'll break your lovely neck."

Oh, I made it all right. I got good and sore once I really started trying.

And don't think she took long about getting the suit and hardware. It was like all of a sudden saying the wrong thing to the wrong person at a fancy party.

She just stood there while I looked things over to see if anything had been tampered with. Maybe I'd been a heel, at that. For the first time since I'd been with her, there was a look that could've been unhappiness in her eyes.

"Don't, Joe," she said. I had the helmet in my hands, ready to put it on and test the mixing valves.

The helmet was an ugly thing, and Jjora and her city, her garden, her friends, were beautiful things, beyond the imaginings of a man from a bawdy civilization such as the one from which I had come. Something was holding me, and I knew I was in another one of those spots where you either jump off the diving board on the next spring or you don't jump at all.

I had the helmet in my hands. For some reason, Jjora wanted me to drop it. Without taking time to think, I thrust it over my head.

Maybe you've guessed already what happened then.

Qyylao was the same bleak, gray, wasted place that it had been when I had first set foot upon it, and the city in the distance was hollow, empty, and dead with the death of a million years.

HOW long I stood that way, with the helmet on, the suit a heap at my feet, the ray-pistol holstered beside it, I don't know. I stood there long enough to think the thing through as far as I could, I know that.

The first thing I reasoned was that something was going on that the lead lining in my helmet had a hell of a lot to do with. *It* had no power to show me things that didn't exist. But with the lead lining, put there for protection against harmful space radiations, it did have a damn good stopping power.

The second thing I reasoned was that you don't build cities of precious metals unless your planet abounds in them—and your planet isn't heavy unless it packs some

pretty solid ore-lodes, even if they're only lead.

And the city hadn't been built of lead, transmuted or otherwise.

The third thing I reasoned was that if there were ore here it should mean dough in my pocket, so I had to repair my Omicron and get back to the lugger so I could set up things on Qyyiao for some extensive operating.

Which I should've done right then.

I'm practical enough when I don't get het up—especially when it means money. But when I'm curious, or when I'm a little riled—or when I'm both, I can get some screwy ideas. And like the poet once said, "a man's a man for a' that an' a' that. . . ."

The fourth thing I reasoned was that in addition to the ore, I might still have Jjora.

If, of course, she were real.

So instead of admitting to a bellyful, I stuck out my neck for more. Literally. I took the helmet off again.

Jjora was gone.

But Qyyiao was once more in all its glory. I figured there were two things to do; first, I had to find the girl, and second, if I were going to entertain any ideas about her, I had to find out if she were real, or if she and the paradise in which she lived were nothing more than a bunch of radiations that could be stopped by the lining in a space-helmet.

The solution of that problem, I was pretty certain, would clear up in no time flat if I could find the Machine of Illusion. Jjora had said that the bleak, dead Qyyiao was the illusion. And I had a hunch that she believed it—for some reason, had to believe it. But even counterfeit money has two sides.

I found her, watching the men at their games. And while I had been locating a good hiding place for the suit—you bet the pistol was strapped to my thigh—and had been walking back to the city, I worked out what I thought was a pretty decent

strategy. The only thing that bothered me was remembering how she'd dug my first name out of my brain without my even knowing.

She was standing with a large group of women near one of the smaller sports arenas, and believe me, I had no trouble in picking her out from among all the other young goddesses.

There was only one girl like Jjora, even on Qyyiao.

She turned even before I called her name. She smiled, but it was not the same kind of smile as before, and I should've known I was being like a kid in school. But those things don't make much difference when a creature like Jjora has gotten in your blood.

"I've been let back in again," I said. "Maybe that means you and your people will forgive me for—for the things I said. I'm sorry."

"Of course you are forgiven, Joe," she said. "Unhappiness would mar our world. There is no room here for any but the most graceful thing. And unhappiness is not a graceful thing. And you have shared our life; what other is there that you could wish?"

She came close to me again, and extended her arms. "There are precious metals in the very ground over which you walk," she murmured, "but to what advantage is the lowly toil of their acquisition with your machines—the baseness of the scheming for their barter, when the perfect life of our planet is yours merely for the asking? Let us return to the Garden of Dreams together, Joe. . . ."

The men continued at their gaming, the women watched. Jjora clung to me, kissed me, openly and with no shame.

So I played my little trick.

"What do you see in my mind, Jjora?" I asked. I tried to fill my mind with the idea. Had she been looking for anything but sincerity, she probably would have found me out.

But I gambled that she'd be satisfied with what she saw first.

"I see that you are still sorrowful, still wish in some way to make amends for the guilt you feel, Joe. And I see promises of—of—" I concentrated hard. I knew that my mind was up against something much stronger than hers alone. I could feel it. "— Of many great delights, Joe!" she was saying. "You wish the peace and beauty, wonderful idleness and ease of Qyylao for your own people. And in return, there would be promise of many gifts for my people—intriguing gifts, that would forever please our fancies."

"Anything you wanted," I lied, "to play with. New pleasures, new indulgences, new joys for your planet, Jjora." I hoped she missed the overtone of irony that I could not keep from my voice. "But to do this," I said slowly, "I must have knowledge of the Machine of Illusion. It is the greatest accomplishment of your forebears, for it has kept their posterity from—contamination. For my people to live as yours, they, too, would need the secret of your device. Would you take me to it, so that I might study its working, and learn how to reproduce it for my people?"

I knew if I slipped just one jot from the right angle of approach to the problem I would miss the boat. Something just hanging on the fringe of my subconscious told me that I had two birds to kill with my stone.

I had to convince Jjora.

And something else.

I think it was the promise of "new pleasures, new indulgences, new joys," that hit both targets for me. Because that idea was the keystone of the half-witted philosophy behind this whole business, and I was sure of it.

"I will show you the Machine of Illusion," she said at last.

And I knew I was about to discover whether I would be able to have Jjora, or not.

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CHAPTER THREE

Into the Crypt

I COULD tell that what Jjora was doing was not to her liking; the caverns beneath the shining city were distasteful enough to me. They, I knew, like the empty city of Qyyiao as I had first seen it, had not echoed a human voice or to the sound of footsteps in untold centuries. They were neither dark nor light, but simply shadow, and somewhere in them was the thing I wanted.

Jjora's hand was in mine as we descended, picked our way over the uneven, broken tile-work that must once have been the floor of a utility tunnel. The air was stale and dank, and I could hear Jjora choke on it. But she kept leading me, yard by yard, turn by turn. I could feel her tremble, and I knew she was afraid, revolted. For the tunnels, even had they once been appealing to the eye, had long since begun this disintegration into mouldering ruin.

Jjora picked her way as though uncertain, yet as though knowing where she must lead.

"You've never been down here before, have you?" I asked. My voice echoed flatly from the slime-smooth walls and sounded like the voice of a dead man.

"No," she said.

"Yet, you know where—"

"I—am—learning as we go," she said.

"Do the others know?"

"Of the Machine, they have always known; knowledge of it is deep within their brains. It is protection, and the life of Qyyiao. . . ."

You bet it was.

"But I mean," I said, "do they know where it is?"

"No more than do I," she said, "yet the way is within my mind."

And it was, because at length, we came to a series of corroding panels, once set flush

with the sides of the tunnel. It was in front of perhaps the twentieth—the widest and stoutest of them—that we stopped.

And Jjora's slender fingers groped in the slime of the tunnel wall. It was as though she were in a deep trance, not quite alive, not quite dead.

At length the panel slid back, hesitatingly, noisily, but it moved. And it opened upon a subterranean amphitheater ten times the size of the Hall of Suns!

Despite its size and the half-light of the shadows that engulfed us, I should have been able to see at least to both sides of this Gargantuan pocket, but I could not. That they were not empty, and that housed here was more than the colossus of engineering which sprawled before us, I was certain. But despite all my efforts, I could not see what I knew to be there—lining the curving sides of the amphitheater for its entire circumference and towering above our heads to the full height of the vaulted roof. But I think Jjora saw.

The machine hung in silence scant feet above the smooth, steel-hard floor, just as the miniature suns hung above the pillars in the great hall at which I had banqueted. In size it was perhaps a third the length and half the width of my space-lugger; in shape it resembled an old-fashioned electro-calculator. There were rows upon rows of grids and relays.

"The vacuum grids, upon which the thought-impulses are recorded, and the relays, which control their direction, selection, and intensity," Jjora read my mind.

I stared at transformers and condensers, intricate rectifiers and trunk-circuits of a complexity far beyond my understanding.

"With this great mechanism," Jjora was saying, "do we of Qyyiao maintain the illusion of a bleak, dead planet to all would-be intruders . . . it governs the admittance of those we might wish among us, the exclusion of those who would pollute our civilization." Again, she spoke as though parroting her explanation.

"The recorded thought-impulses, I suppose, are of a specific pattern which establish a mental set of depression, insecurity and impotence," I said. "Is that what you would tell me, Jjora?"

"Yes," she answered as though in a hypnotic trance. "A mental set, established through telehypnosis, carried to—"

"Jetwash!" I snapped at her. "Come out of it baby, and show me the master switch on this pile of junk. Six to five you aren't even real! Want me to tell you what's recorded on those grids? Dreams, baby, just dreams!"

She didn't have to show me the master switch, because I was at least smart enough to have picked out the control panel on the thing. Faster than I could think what I was doing, because I knew I'd be sunk if I let the thought even form completely in my brain, I snapped over the biggest lever on the panel, and knew I had broken the main drive-circuits.

JJORA was gone, all right. And I was able to see to the sides and almost to the end of the huge place. I knew without thinking about it how the city above me looked.

I knew everything on Qyyiao was just as it had been when I put on my helmet a couple of hours before.

Because lining the sides of the great amphitheater were oblong coffins of still-uncorroded metal, stacked to the roof, packed end-to-end in endless tiers easily fifty deep.

There were probably half a million.

I blew one open with a cut-back blast of my ray-pistol. And in it was a man who could have been any one of the men I had seen in the sporting arenas, or at the banquet table, or with the women in the shaded alcoves.

I didn't need to open any more.

And when the low, ghostly moaning began to fill the great place, I knew I was right.

Once, the people of Qyyiao had attained the height of their civilization—had attained perfection, if you want to call it that. They had reached the point where you either appreciate what you've got and do something with it, or take a free ride on what those who have gone before you have provided.

They were taking the ride.

They had made their machine for effortless dreaming—for dreaming through untold millennia of every lust, every physical comfort, every desire their minds could imagine—and then had settled on their backs for a million-year snooze while the machine gave out with what they wanted. Dreams.

The waste of Qyyiao was the thing that was reality.

While my lead-lined helmet had been off, the amplified thought-recordings had taken me over as it had those in the coffins. Part of my mind had been made to dream, and I had been drawn into their dreams—and not denied, because I was something new—a new dream-thing for them to play with.

I guess Jjora had been in the greatest need for something to "intrigue her fancy," although I can't figure why.

To keep their slumberland convincing, of course, they had had to kid themselves into believing that the machine worked the opposite way from which it actually did. It's no fun having a dream if you know that that's all it really is.

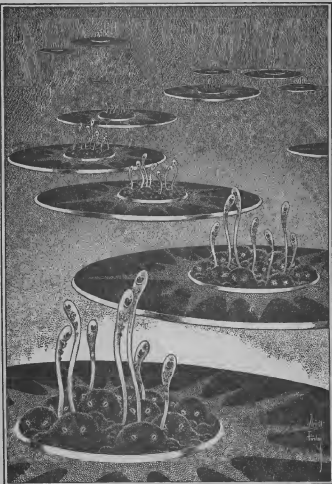
And there they were, a bunch of the laziest zombies I ever came across—dreaming their fun because it had been just too much work to go out and keep their perfection alive and useful. The great-grandpa of all lawn-chair colonies. . . .

But don't contaminate us, Mr. Kosta!

Well, I knew there wouldn't be any Jjora for me, but everything else I wanted was hardly inches beneath the ground I walked on.

I could still hear them moaning their

(Continued on page 108)



A great mass of Outsiders came sailing in
from the nearer planets. . . .

The LAST DARK

By La SELLE GILMAN

*Only flaming destruction remained for Earth, the day
the final struggle began between the men who thought
they were the planet's elite—and the tiny group who
could prove they were!*

IT WAS an elderly* yak-herder who found the thing. He was tranquilly tending his hairy oxen on the bleak, storm-swept plateau when an airplane plunged screaming out of the sky where black winds raged. It crashed into the ice of a frozen lake, scattering wreckage and debris in all directions.

The herdsman, a solitary and melancholy greybeard with skin like dried orange peel, considered this occurrence with calm detachment for a week or so, and then picked up some of the pieces, saving what he considered of value and not bothering with stray arms and legs. Among the salvage was a small metal box, labeled: *This Side Up, Handle With Care and Fragile*. Another stencil explained: *Made in US—* but the rest of the lettering had been scraped off in the crashup.

When he opened the box, he immediately recognized the contents as an atomic bomb. Studying it through slitted eyes, he saw that it was a simple weapon, poorly constructed by amateurish armorers, but he

noted with some amusement that, crude as it was, it might be fairly effective if its awkward mechanism would release the elusive chain reaction. The yak-herder at the time happened to be meditating on the second of the four sublime verities—*Trishna*, that the cause of all pain is but desire, and was engaged in a study of the chain-of-causation, the *Pratityasamutpada*. This coincidence led him to contemplate the device itself, a cumbersome, thirty-pound ball about the size of his own head.

So he set it aside as a doorflap-stopper for his woolly *yurt* and it served him as an object of revery until spring winds melted the snows and opened the high passes of the Kunluns and the Himalayas.

When, finally, the ragged old man moved his herd out past the salt flats and across the lonely, barren tablelands to the great monastery at Tashi-lunpo, he took the battered metal box along. He had concluded that the learned Keeper of the Archives, or perhaps even the honored Custodian of the Museum of Primitive Cultures, might deem

to add this ugly object to the great collection of oddities and curiosities from the Outside. When he had crawled into the presence, fur cap in hand, and humbly submitted it, the yellow-robed official in charge accepted it with reluctant indifference, pointing out that the museum was already overstocked with exhibits of ancient war implements such as the spear, the matchlock and the spacerocket.

But after the Custodian was respectfully informed of the circumstances by which this unworthy relic had arrived on the Roof of the World he was mildly interested. He rewarded the herder, a celibate philosopher until then, with a plump middle-aged widow, a gallon of hundred-proof koumiss and a fourth-hand copy of the sacred sutras, hand-illuminated by an ancient holy man.

The Custodian then carried the box to the Department of Antiquities at Shigatse, where he delivered it to the Research Bureau.

Dr. Shrong-tsan, the Director of the bureau, examined the queer inscriptions on the box but made very little of them except; of course, for their general significance. He pointed out to his bowing assistant that while the lettering was in English that meant nothing since none of the Outside tribes wished to admit ownership of such a thing and would attempt to conceal the origin by various childish subterfuges; hence the printing might just as well be in Sanskrit, or Russian—or Icelandic.

"However," the Director said thoughtfully, swinging a silver earring against his high cheekbone, "though these silly warnings may be extraneous—I doubt very much if this quaint cracker would go off with all that unwieldy mass of U-235 jammed into a mould—I think the matter should be brought to the attention of the Minister of Security. It's the first tangible evidence we've received that the barbarians have actually reached some understanding of atomic energy and its more basic uses, and His Excellency needs a jolt. He's

become much too complacent of late."

The kowtowing assistant dared to lift his eyebrows. "Surely," he muttered, "you've seen our extensive field reports on the last interclan disturbances. Hiroshima and Bikini and all that—"

"I know," Dr. Shrong-tsan said testily. "Our observers at Los Alamos and Omsk have kept us well-informed, but it's really been largely hearsay. Mere speculation on their groping advances through nuclear fission, the mass production of their uninspired discoveries, and so on. This is something we can put our finger on."

He put his smooth, yellow finger on the bomb. "Here is an example of what all their hysterical and supposedly secret bustle is about—a stupid little explosive charge that probably didn't cost more than a million and a half paper dollars. They boast of it, on their blatting radios, as 'the world's most potent destructive force!' There's a belly-laugh for you. Even if some cunning clan could produce them like barleycakes and set them off all at once they wouldn't make a half-respectable earthquake. I believe they're trying these out in their antique subnarines and guided missiles, but they haven't even learned how to detonate all the plutonium yet; it's effective only to the extent of about one-tenth of one per cent, and the rest goes to waste. Imagine! And their knowledge in this field, as in most fields, is still most elementary."

The assistant discreetly withdrew and hurried off to the Street of Ten Million Manuscripts to bone up on atomic versus metaphysical power.

WHEN midsummer opened the caravan trails, Dr. Shrong-tsan made a business trip to the capital at Lhasa, and carried the heavy box in his baggage though it was nearly a full load for one of the camels. After he had arrived in the Forbidden City he took it to the Security Office in the Potala.

He was conducted by a hooded guard

down a long, dim corridor, up several flights of narrow stone steps, and through a series of galleries to a brass-bound door, and was received with utmost ceremony. He always disliked the atmosphere of the Office, a chilly hole lit by soft, green lantern-glow and hung with rustling lamaistic banners of faded silk; it stank of incense rising from burners by an altar to the Four Kings. But the Minister, loafing in a plain red sports-robe beside a tea-table, greeted him casually.

"Hmm," His Excellency said, having glanced at the strange object and read the Director's report, "what in the devils d'you make of it, eh?"

The Director shrugged. "I've consulted with a number of our technicians and the experts at the Tibetan Science Institute. The ethnologists are rather impressed. They re-emphasize that these Outside tribes have certain peculiar instincts and tendencies toward self-destruction. Seems to be part of their biological equipment. While they've made practically no progress in recent centuries from a truly cultural or intellectual standpoint, they apparently have reached a definite milestone with this lethal little gadget."

"Have you been to see the Dalai about it?"

"I haven't even seen the Bogdo-Lama yet. He's busy experimenting with improving the climate in the Sanpo valley."

The Minister reflectively trickled his jade prayer beads through his hands, and his veiled eyes were dreamy. "Yes," he said, "he's been getting in the last shipments of grain and fruit seeds from the Southern Hemisphere, and is anxious to start the new nurseries. Claims we're now practically self-sufficient. . . . Just what would this bomb do if it were to burst?"

"Not much," Dr. Sbrong-tsan smiled. "Wipe out a city or two, perhaps. Create an amount of radioactive spray in a strategic harbor, but that would affect only a limited area. And if it were smuggled into a town and exploded in a cellar it probably

wouldn't damage more than a few blocks."

"How about dust?"

"It couldn't be effectively dispersed except in very large amounts, deposited accurately. Their poorly stockpiled dust decays, you know, which is a disadvantage—to them."

"What I'm getting at," the Minister said with patience, "is, what damage could this contraption do, say, to Lhasa?"

"Ah," the Director murmured. "There's a point. While this is little better than a toy, it could do terrific harm to our sacred Potala, inside which we are now seated, and knock out all the lamaseries and temples in town. There might be a death toll of around ten thousand among the monks, and thousands more among the traders of sheep and carpets in the bazaars. Deform and stunt the children, and make our women more loathsomely ugly than they are—"

"Siva forbid!"

"There'd be a bit of radioactivity to cope with. . . ."

"That's all I wanted to know!" the Minister said decisively, sitting up straight. "This thing has gone too far! Who do those upstart savages out there in the hinterlands think they are, anyway? One of their bungling airplanes-drivers could accidentally drop a load here as easily as in a remote salt lake, and the center of our civilization would be endangered. Despite our intricate and extensive system of underground lead-lined suburbs we're vulnerable, and I'm damned to the hundred-and-eighth Hell if we're going to redesign Lhasa and the whole cradle of mankind to guard against such stupidity!"

"What do you propose?" Dr. Sbrong-tsan asked with caution.

"We'll put Plan Nirvana into effect immediately, that's what! I've already got the supreme go-ahead from the Sovereign Pontiff and the Council to act whenever I deem it necessary for reasons of security."

"I don't think I'm entirely familiar—"

"Plan Nirvana," His Excellency repeated shortly. "Extinction. Blow 'em out!"

"Yes, yes, but by what means? Do you plan to use the global virulent bacteriological spray?"

The Minister snorted. "You know, doctor, your conservatism makes you a touch old-fashioned. Of course not the spray. Their medicine men just might have something cooking 'up their sleeves to combat that; it's too uncertain. Sprays against pests aren't always completely effective, remember."

"There's the rockets," the Director said, hesitating. "And of course the resettlement project on the moon."

"Not too feasible either. I've talked it over with our lunar authorities. They say our new colony there isn't ready quite yet to handle a sudden influx of two million Tibetans. Besides, that's negative, a defeatist way of dealing with this annoying problem. Tantamount to a retreat before the barbaric hordes. No, we'll simply annihilate 'em. They've been getting far too cocky for the last half millennium and we should have taken action long ago, when they first discovered firearms, or America, or thereabouts. You can't confine 'em on reservations, you know—they're too unruly and haven't the faintest notion of obeying international law. One world, they yap! We'll show 'em one world!"

DR. SBRONG-TSAN walked slowly back through the twisting, narrow streets to his caravanserai, thoughtfully observing the great city in its bowl of crystal mountains, peering up at the houses set like nests on the crests of wide terraces. He strolled along the granite flagstones between high buildings with leaning white walls; the way respectfully opened for him through crowds of hawkers and horsemen, lamas and soldiers, dogs and donkeys. The mammoth Potala rose above it all, chalky white as if sculptured

in alabaster, and set sharply against a turquoise sky.

A breeze blew over the ancient plane trees in the inn courtyard, their moving tops like green enamel. The Director sought his apartment and climbed into an ass' milk bath. He lay back in the obsidian tub, eating a bowl of curds and tsamba, and considered Plan Nirvana. He had only a superficial knowledge of modern weapons and methods of wiping out populations. In a vague way he was in favor of it. As long as the Outsiders brawled and spawned among themselves and kept strictly away from the frontiers he didn't care what mad follies they indulged, and if they decimated each other, so much the better. But when they began encroaching on his native fastness on the Roof of the World and carelessly scattered these absurd but alarming jimcracks about, it was time to take positive steps.

"After all," the Director said aloud, as though to reassure himself, "we've got along perfectly well without 'em for several thousand years. They're just a nuisance."

A shaven-poll'd attendant had entered with a jar of hot milk to warm his bath, and said, "Huh?"

"Have you ever seen an Outsider?" Dr. Shrong-tsan asked him.

"Sure," the muscular youth replied, rubbing goat-gland oil into the Director's wiry hair. "I seen a coupla explorers they had in a cage in a sideshow down by the Karma Temple about fifty years ago. Pale-lookin' jerks. They had another one, too; he was a missionary, though, so the guards took him up to work in the uranium mines."

"I can't see what possible advantage there would be to us to permit them to continue to go on," the Director said absently. "They'll only get themselves into a worse mess than they're in now, and eventually involve us. We've got to protect our own interests when we're threatened. Uncivilized races just shouldn't play with fire."

"I'll tell you," the attendant confided,

"I wouldn't give you a plugged amulet for a whole reincarnation of 'em. Conduct 'em to the other shore—that's my motto!"

The motto which was spread far and wide throughout the land by the evening's telepathy broadcast was not exactly that, though it bore the same connotation. Dr. Sbrong-tsan was resting in his luxurious quarters when he received the Minister's public announcement launching Plan Nirvana, and the word that was passed was: "Obliterate the Habitat!"

This, the Minister explained to the fascinated populace, was to be accomplished by the Nirvana Bomb. Everyone knew about it, of course, so he didn't go into detail. It was the most refined distillate of atomic energy ever produced, and was enclosed in a platinum casing the size of a melon-seed. It would be removed from the vaults of the national laboratories deep beneath the city the following morning, and a staff of competent armorers would carefully lower it into the yawning mouth of the awesome Blow-Hole in the Ramo-Chhe courtyard. When it had reached the core of the earth, about noon, it would be touched off. The occasion, the Minister added benignly, would be a general holiday.

"You all recognize the necessity for this defensive action," he said, "and I'm sure you all know that it's the only humane and civilized course to take. An ounce of prevention, so to speak. We have stocked the country with every known species of useful birds, beasts and fishes, in pairs, and with all the seeds of all desirable vegetation. We've never had much need for the Outside, of course, beyond a trivial token trade in block-tea and gewgaws. All they've ever wanted from us, in their ignorance, were yak-tails and gold. What they use the tails for I'm blasted if I know, unless it's to attach them to their savage costumes for war dances. As for the gold, we dug it up from the earth and sent it to them and they put it back in a hole in the ground again, which is just another example of their I.Q."

The telepathic screens throughout the country rocked with laughter.

"Now don't be alarmed when the signal is given," His Excellency added. "The explosion will cause you no inconvenience. There will be sixteen thousand yellow gowned lamas stationed at key points along all the borders, concentrating intensely on their vast spiritual powers of levitation to lift our realm bodily and absorb the shock. You'll hardly feel a thing, and it won't hurt a bit. Just relax and repeat the ritualistic formulas. Thus we shall attain true liberation. . . . There will be dancing in the streets starting immediately afterward, and refreshments will be served by the Council until midnight. Now, are there any questions?"

There was a moment of silence and then came the mutter of an aged hermit from an ice-cave in the distant peaks of the Karakorum. "Yes," he said in a hollow voice, "how is this act to be reconciled with my teachings of benevolence to all living things, even the fleas that infest my rags and the most noxious vermin that plague me?" Two million telepaths breathlessly waited.

"Quite simply," the Minister replied in a cheerful and reasonable shade of thought. "They won't be living things any longer. They'll be nothing. Now then, do you approve?"

"We do!" the screens roared the collective answer with enthusiasm.

"So be it," His Excellency murmured, and signed off.

The Director sat up quite late that night, smoking several pipes of opium and twisting the knobs and dials of his powerful radio. He tuned in everything he could find in the ether: soap operas and quiz shows, comedians and commentators, mystery dramas, town meetings, swing bands, newscasts, farm bulletins, the team of Crosby and Godfrey, and listened intently even to the commercials. Then he switched it all off for the last time and went to bed. He

slept badly and had dreams, but blamed it on the poor quality of the domestic poppy.

HE STOOD, drawn and haggard, the next day on the balcony of the inn listening to the deep vibrations of the noonday gongs from the temples. There were immense crowds in the streets and courtyards, still and expectant. The people, with faces the color of mud, stood waiting calm and powerful in their rough red jackets and their black pantaloons tacked into long boots with turned-up toes; some carried the short, double-curved yataghans and among them moved cowed lamas chanting over their revolving prayer wheels. The city swarmed with beasts and peoples, and above it the banners whipped in the wind.

They all knew that the boundaries and everything beneath them had been completely insulated and the air purifiers were working, but they were a little uneasy. They need not have been. When the Nirvana Bomb was exploded, it was a disappointment to the sensation-seekers, though a surprising relief for most. They expelled a mass sigh.

The shock was so gentle that it did not even stir the leaves of the Bo-trees. There were no terrifying gales or shattering quakes or vomiting walls of volcanic flame, as the rumormongers had predicted. Dr. Sbrong-tsan himself felt a slight jar, and heard the faintest of subterranean rumbles. A large puff of black, greasy smoke rose majestically from the courtyard of the Ramo-Chhe Temple into the heavens, belched up from the mouth of the fearful Blow-Hole, and the howling upper winds sweeping above the encircling mountain barrier snatched it away. The Director experienced a slight uneasiness in the pit of his stomach and a moment of indefinable uneasiness in his mind. That was all. Then the cymbals clashed, the gongs roared, trumpets brayed and flutes twittered and the deep and resonant bellow of the great

lama-horns began. The monks raised up their arms, standing in their brick-red vestments, and the tension broke. The people shouted, and began to dance and feast.

The Director returned uncertainly to his apartment and sank down on a silken couch, waiting for the Minister of Security to appear on the telepathic screen. He did not wait long. His Excellency was suddenly there, full of news and self-satisfaction.

"The obliteration of the habitat has been accomplished," he announced. "All is well. Our levitators did a splendid job. Splendid! They raised up our land by all the corners and held us suspended so neatly that I doubt if one dish has been broken, or a single rock rolled down the mighty slopes of Everest." He chuckled. "You'll note I've used the Outside designation for our holy mountain. Just a bad habit—these things are forgotten slowly. Now, if you'll be patient and stay tuned to me, I'll have further flash reports as they come in from the outposts. . . ."

Dr. Sbrong-tsan mixed himself a stiff bhang-and-soda and tried to be patient. Presently the Minister was back.

"Everything has gone off as scheduled just as our scientists worked it out several hundred years ago," he said blandly. "The border patrols say that beyond the frontier as far as super-radar can reach, every living thing has vanished completely, all in the flick of an eyelash. It was there, and then it was not. No leaf, no green blade of grass, no fruit or flower survives. The streams and lakes have disappeared in steam. No animal or fish or fowl moves in the gray, empty and barren desert beyond our mountain walls. And, of course no man—there are no more Outsiders."

The Director stirred restless and gulped his drink.

"I might say," the Minister added, "that it will be unnecessary to send out expeditions to verify the forecasts. It is safe to say that the entire earth is exactly like that part of it which we can observe. The

oceans are gone, making the continents indistinguishable. My friends, we have at last attained the true liberation!"

There was a great deal of confused cheering on the screen, and the sound of swelling music, with the big horns groaning. Dr. Sbrong-tsan shut off his screen.

Through the sunny afternoon he sat in his room, moodily drinking bhang-and-soda. It occurred to him that the Minister had overlooked one thing—by obliterating the habitat he had eliminated all future threat to the security of the land had thereby inadvertently obliterated his own job. He would probably have to retire to one of the isolated lamaseries to earn his living. This reflection only faintly revived the Director's spirits.

He sat by the window in the dusk, watching the celebrations in the streets and the last rays of the sun as they set the sparkling eternal snows all afire in the towering ranges and tumbled, jagged peaks. There were no clouds in the sky and he remembered that the Science Institute had previously announced that this condition would have no appreciable effect on the weather, since the Roof of the World was too high to be seriously whipped by the

wild, dry hurricanes that now scourged the ravished earth beneath. Counter-storm measures had been taken.

AFTER a time the stars came out and the red moon rose, round and full. He stared at the chilly orb for a long while and then on impulse switched on his screen again and called the manager of the colony there. It took some moments to make the contact, and when he did the manager sounded distraught. But the men on the moon were usually that way, under the stress and strain of new conditions, and Dr. Sbrong-tsan, who had considerable influence, managed to hold the fellow's distracted attention.

"Look here," the Director said, "how do things appear down here from your point of view?"

"Like bloody hell!" the manager said bitterly. "Worse than this place, if that's possible. What a mess!"

"D'you mean everything?"

"Everything but where you are, of course. You look like a nice, cozy, green spot of fungus on the yellow dome of a skull!"

(Continued on page 109)



ON THE NEWSSTANDS

THE TORCH

By Jack Bechdolt



From the Earth's dead yesterdays it shone, its flame a treason, its message hope—while its last embattled champion fought the strange inhuman civilization that had spawned him—for his birthright in the stars!

Don't miss this great novel, by a master of Fantasy, and other top-ranking stories in the April issue, on sale now at all newsstands.

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FANTASTIC
Novels



Conducted by Frederik Pohl

"I, ROBOT" by Isaac Asimov, Ph.D.
Gnome Press; \$2.50.

For more than a decade, Isaac Asimov's positronic robots have been familiar figures in the pages of science-fiction magazines, and in more than one anthology. Now, for the first time, Dr. Asimov has selected his nine favorites from the series, wrapped them up in an ingenious framework and offers them as a new and exciting novel of science fiction. The time of *"I, Robot"* is Anno Domini 2057; a reporter for Interplanetary Press is interviewing Dr. Susan Calvin, staff robopsychologist for U.S. Robot Corporation. And the nine stories in *"I, Robot"* are nine incidents in her life.

First comes the story of "Robbie", the nursemaid-robot whom readers of *Super Science Stories* as far back as 1940 will remember as the hero of *"Strange Playfellow"*. Then come *"Runaround"*, *"Reason"*, *"Catch That Rabbit"*, *"Liar!"*, *"Little Lost Robot"*, *"Escape!"*, *"Evidence"* and *"The Evitable Conflict"*. It's as fine a collection of Asimov stories as you'll ever see, and a book that has been over-due for years.

"FURY" by Henry Kuttner. Grosset & Dunlap; \$1.00.

This is the story of the New Earth—the home humanity has made for itself, after blasting the mother planet to sterile dust

in an atomic war, at the bottom of the sea of Venus. Great pressure domes called the Keeps house the strange cities of this far future civilization, and in the cities live rolstering adventurers, 'flabby esthetes criminals and, over all, the grim, omnipotent Immortals. *"Fury"* is the story of an Immortal whose heritage had been stolen from him at birth—and his struggle, at the cost of his whole civilization, to win back his birthright.

The big news about *"Fury"* (which was originally published under the name of Laurence O'Donnell) is that it is undoubtedly the first time a major science-fiction novel has been published as a hard-cover book "original" at so low a price as a dollar—or anything close to it. But this flamboyant and convincing yarn called *"Fury"* would be a bargain at almost any price—don't miss it!

"THE ISLAND OF CAPTAIN SPARROW" by S. Fowler Wright. Grosset & Dunlap; \$1.00.

As big a bargain as *"Fury"*, and in a different way just as important a book, is this famous science-adventure story of a ship-wrecked traveler on a lost island inhabited by satyrs, man-eating birds, a lost tribe—and a girl. S. Fowler Wright is far more of an artisan in wordcraft than any

but a handful of practising science-fiction writers in these days; his brilliant translation of Dante, his critical and historical novels have given him a world reputation entirely apart from his science fiction. But, immaculate though his prose may be, he has never let it get in the way of the story he had to tell; and *"The Island of Captain Sparrow"* will hold your interest for every last page.

"CONAN THE CONQUEROR" by Robert E. Howard. Gnome Press; \$2.75.

The jacket of *"Conan the Conqueror"* calls the book a work of "science fantasy", but you'll search a long time through its 256 pages before you discover any science at all. Pure fantastic action-adventure describes its contents far better, for Conan's mighty thews (he stands seven feet tall, and lightnings crash about his head) strive against the most imposing succession of warlocks, sorcerers and master-magicians risen from the dead found anywhere outside the mythical pages of the *Nekronomikon*.

The Jacket is by John Forte, and a fine job it is. There is a persuasive and enlightening introduction by John D. Clark, Ph.D., and a map of Conan's world, drawn by David Kyle, to illuminate the endpapers.

"THE GREEN MAN OF GRAYPEC" by Festus Pragnell. Greenberg; Publisher; \$2.50.

The trouble with *"The Green Man of Graypec"* is the trouble with a good half of all science-fiction published before World War II—first, its "science" is dated; second, it flouts the honored and useful law of the "single great lie" (which simply states that the most a science-fiction writer can reliably expect his readers to follow is a single assumption; and everything else should follow logically from it.) Here, for instance, we not only have a single unknown, solitary scientist in the possession

of both a super-electron microscope capable of viewing the surface of an electron as easily as you view the ground at your feet and a "memory transferer," but you have a whole system of new laws of science, weapons and strange alien races.

However, if you can manage to swallow the first few chapters without bad results, you'll find what comes after as rewarding a science-fiction adventure yarn as you'll want to come across—as did, among others, no less a personage than H. G. Wells. Moreover, you're sure to like the brilliant, full-color jacket design by Hannes Bok.

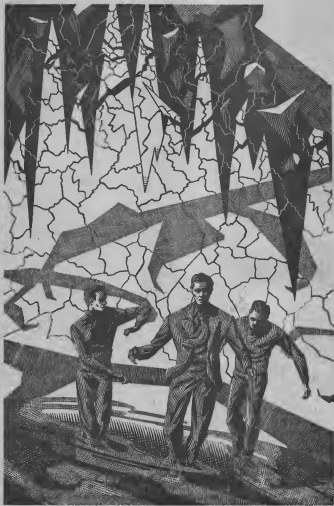
"COSMIC ENGINEERS" by Clifford D. Simak. Gnome Press; \$2.50.

Here is one of the most famous science-fiction novels of the '30s, revised, expanded and brought to you as a decorative and delightful new book. *"Cosmic Engineers"* is epic science fiction in the universe-shaking trend of E. E. Smith and the earliest stories of John Campbell; there are few subtleties in this saga of alien universes, but there is plenty of thrilling action, dramatic clashes with strange races and more super-scientific imagination than you'll find in a dozen average science-fiction novels. Edd Cartier did the decorative jacket, and the binding of the book itself is about the nicest job you'll come across in the field.

"A GNOME THERE WAS" by Lewis Padgett. Simon & Schuster; \$2.50.

Here's Henry Kuttner again, this time under still another of his pen names. This is no novel, but a compendium of eleven stories, eight of them science fiction and the remainder fantasies. Kuttner is about as agile a man with a typewriter as science-fiction possesses, and it is no secret that in these and practically all of his other stories of the last decade he has had the expert help of his wife, otherwise known as C. (for Catherine) L. Moore. When this impressive duo sets out to construct a story

(Continued on page 118)





In another place, where
darkness thickened, the
shadows stood upright like
solid bodies . . .

DANGER DIMENSION

Through the black portal they went—the advance guard of Earth's last chaos—into a universe that did not exist, filled with the spawning shadow life of a dimension gone mad—which slithered ceaselessly, ever closer—to the world of men!

CHAPTER ONE

Haunted Cyclotron

THE emergency faculty meeting was already in progress. One hand on the doorknob, John Storm hesitated, dreading to go inside and face the battery of coldly alien and unfriendly eyes. Eyes which would be wary, suspicious, and full of that uneasy resentment which age and experience feels for youth. It was hard for Storm to realize that he was a full-

fledged faculty member, and not an erring student called before the hoary tribunal for judgment.

There would be questions inside, and Storm had given his fill of unsatisfactory answers in the last three days. He could offer no easy solution to the mystery, and some questions would suggest complicity in—or at least a subtle foreknowledge

By STANLEY MULLEN

of—that event which first set all tongues wagging, then clamped frosty censorship on all concerned. The campus had become a madhouse the past three days since Morlake had disappeared; and Storm was the last person known to have seen and talked with him.

Storm hesitated, shuddering. Before, he had evaded questions, but now there would be no further dodging. Questions would be asked and must be answered. Trustees and faculty were gathered in grim thirst for the kill; the pack was in full cry; they wanted blood and anybody's—especially Storm's—would do. He opened the door and plunged into the sea of eyes. Blurred murmur of voices swirled about him; he was aware of pallid faces dancing like masks dangled on strings, of turbulent movement as if soberly clad bodies rose and fell in waves. The voices thrust shrill questions at him and eyes hemmed Storm in like a frieze of naked rapiers.

Not immediately conscious of what was said, Storm knew already what the general trend would be. One voice, snarling and fretful, emerged from general tumult and became a symbol of it.

"... Last person to talk with him. Surely you must know something."

It was Old Frudey, the dean, who could have posed for a bust of Schopenhauer. There was a foxlike something about him, with his thin features, shrewd eyes, the ruff of untidy gray fur that curled over a dirty collar, even the quick, darting, vulpine movement of his halting head upon its scrawny neck. Fox, he was, and a mangy, ill-tempered one. Nobody liked Old Frudey—no one could—and for the first time, Storm realized the tragedy of being a Frudey—the ultimate tragedy of being so nasty-minded, bitter, proud and envious—of being so personally repulsive and being unaware of it.

Storm found himself talking, wearily repeating things said before. "I've told

you everything I know. Simon Morlake came to my class room after the faculty meeting three days ago. We talked, but about nothing in particular. I haven't seen him since."

Frudey's voice darted in again, a series of short, sharp barks.

President Arnold bushed him with a gesture. Arnold cleared his throat pompously; with him, every speech was an oration.

"And, apparently, no one has seen him since. No one has come forward with any information. Are you certain you have nothing to add to what has been said, Storm? Surely—"

"Nothing. Nothing important. He has said the same things many times before. To the rest of you, as well as to me. His ideas and speculations were always the core of his conversation. It was not new, nothing in any way different from his usual wild jumping-about, his mental gymnastics, deriving fantastic conclusions from distorted facts. You heard it longer than I have. I'm new—"

Storm's angry flash burned itself out. Arnold shrugged and continued. "I won't hide the facts. The situation is serious. This is our last chance for discussion. If it fails to disclose any new facts about this... mysterious disappearance, I will have no choice but to call in the police."

If threat was implied, it backfired. Storm glared at the University president, at the assemblage. "That should have been done at once," he said savagely.

President Arnold wavered, made aimless, unnecessary gestures. "Let's not be hasty about this. I'm sure we have the good of the college at heart..."

"And our fat jobs," Storm finished. "I know I'm going to get the axe when the term's finished. If you want my opinion, Morlake was tired of faculty meetings. He was tired of your small-town minds, small-town interference. None of you

liked him. Nor me, either. He clung to me because I listened. If I thought he was crazy, I had better manners than to say so. If the police ask me, I'll tell them plenty."

FRUDEY snapped at the opening. "Then he was unhappy here? If so, he may simply have locked his door and left. He was very strange in his behavior lately. I think he disliked us and the college. It would be like him to lock his door and—"

"Yes," Storm sneered. "Lock it and bolt it on the inside. The window, too. He liked mystery, so he created one for you. I remember now something he said Friday. He talked of ghosts and Modern Art, something about Frank Lloyd Wright not providing any space for ghosts, and said that a modern ghost would look like a semi-geometric figure from a painting by Picasso."

Frudey nodded sagely, as if something in his thoughts gave exquisite pleasure. Next, he would be tapping his temple in the universal symbol indicating insanity.

Storm raged on angrily: "He said that if he were designing a castle suitable for old-fashioned haunting and wanted a chamber of horrors for it, he'd pick Frudey above Frankenstein's monster anytime. I said that he was giving the building a bad name with his ghost hunting—that's what he called parapsychology—and he

laughed about it. He said if Frudey did not approve, Frudey could crawl back in the woodwork. But he agreed that parapsychology was childish, a bunch of kids frightening themselves by climbing a dark stairway to experiment with their own sensations. He said he was through with parapsychology, because he had outgrown it, had exhausted its possibilities. It was a blind alley."

President Arnold's head jerked through a series of motions suggestive of a doll's head, rocking to the swing of a concealed pendulum. "That's very interesting," he said gravely, "but it does not help much. There was nothing in your discussion to indicate that Morlake was planning to leave Northside?"

"Not a thing," Storm stated definitely. "Quite the contrary. I know he would not have considered leaving at this time. He was finishing a paper to be published at his own expense. There were five notebooks of figures, and a desktop covered with loose sheaves of notes, the last time I was in his room. He had Dr. Adrian's permission to use the cyclotron during Adrian's absence; so his experiments probably had more to do with practical physics than with psychology. He was very excited about the latest experiments and tied them in with his own advanced speculations, leaving his usual wide gaps in logic. But he said true science was always intuition, later supported by observed facts. He was about to go into de-

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tails on the theories in his new paper—which he said would blast the reactionary deadheads off their collective chairs—when he noticed the time. He jumped up and left. But I know from things he said that he could never consider leaving until he had observed first-hand your reactions to his latest brain-child."

Stephen Blount, one of the trustees, broke in with comment.

"I was always dubious about Simon Morlake's being appointed to our chair of psychology. He seemed too excitable. Has anyone looked over those papers to see if they will throw any light on his . . . disappearance?"

"I was about to suggest that Dr. Storm—" began President Arnold. A voice shouted him down. Frudey's.

"Not Storm. He's a troublemaker, too."

The meeting slid out of focus. Blount's voice was but one element of confusion. It overwhelmed the others by sheer weight.

"It would be folly to delay any longer in calling the police. I agree with Dr. Storm—it should have been done before. There is no reason to suspect foul play, but something must be done. It will look worse for the school if any cover-up is attempted. The man is missing, may be dead. Police investigation is the only answer."

Storm faced the imposing bulk of President Arnold, ignoring the frantic attempts of Frudey to waylay him. "If you don't call the authorities, I will," he said deliberately.

Then he was outside, in the echoing hallway. Descending the stairs, he felt odd hollowness, remembering that he had done the same thing before, with Si Morlake at his side. It was like a trick of double memory. Time seemed to have telescoped, which was a thought that would have interested Morlake. It was incredible that only three days had

elapsed since he had last spoken to Simon Morlake. . . .

MORLAKE had stopped by, at Storm's request. It was on his way, anyhow, since the psychology rooms occupied the second floor, while the mathematics department occupied the ground floor, with chemical labs in the basement, along with heavy experimental equipment like the giant cyclotron—the school's pride and joy. Dr. Adrian, nominal head of the departments housed in the Physics building, was out of town, taking his dead wife's body east. Absently, Storm had gotten a whiskey bottle and two glasses from his desk.

"Here's to school spirit," Morlake had grunted, raising the glass to peer through the amber liquor. "Don't know why I drink the stuff. Don't like it. Like Frudey, the first taste is not too bad, sharp, a little bitter: It goes down and your stomach heaves to meet it. Reminds me of a faculty meeting, with Frudey in the saddle. You've something on your mind. What is it?"

Storm swallowed his whiskey, made a grimace of distaste to hide sudden embarrassment. "You're right. Something on my mind. Not school spirit, not even the alcoholic variety. The Physics Building is haunted. Especially the basement labs and the room with the cyclotron. You've been hanging around the cyclotron a lot, mulling over your weird theories. I wondered if you'd noticed anything."

"Haunted?" Morlake glanced around at the glittering, well-equipped classroom. His gesture took in all parts of a building as modern as the day after tomorrow. It was not the kind of structure to house a ghost. "You're joking, of course?"

"It's no joke," Storm went on seriously. He hesitated. "It's haunted, all right. If not by ghosts, by something else. . . ."

Perhaps Storm had imagined the shadow crossing Morlake's face. The

psychologist had tried a laugh which did not come off. "It's the ghosts of dead ideas," he suggested cynically. "Northside should be full of them, but why here only? It won't do, Storm. It won't do at all. No self-respecting ghost would take up residence in a dump like this. It wouldn't be comfortable—all glass and chromium, raw stone and stainless steel, weird angles and flat roofs, furniture that looks like plumbing, functional simplicity. Ghosts know better. They demand sprawling old mansions, Gothic, Tudor, Jacobean, sliding panels and smoking fireplaces, no plumbing at all, horsehair sofas, dusty wall-tapestries that hands can reach out of to light a cigarette for you. No nonsense. They want comfort."

Storm was stubborn. "You should know more about such things than I do. Spooks are in your line, not mine. This is the real thing—"

Morlake laughed. "That does it," he countered. "Ghosts are in the mind. They don't exist anywhere else. As you say, it's in my department. Psychology. You can stop worrying. When you get a real ghost, it stops being a ghost. Take a pill. Are you really serious about this?"

"Dead serious. It's not just me. The students are talking—it's becoming a campus scandal. I ridiculed the rumor when I first heard of it. Suggested to a couple of them that they transfer to your classes in parapsychology and study psychic phenomena. I thought then that a session of your card tricks would cure them. But I hadn't seen it myself then. Carl Redfield is a camera-bug; he got permission to stay late one night and work. I was impressed by his zeal for study until I found out he was taking pictures and developing them in the chem-sinks downstairs. He'd got some dillies by using infrared light and sensitive film. I wouldn't like to say what he'd aimed the camera at. Not then. Last night was Thursday, so I stayed late myself sweat-

ing over exam papers. I was too tired to go home by the time I finished, so decided to bunk in the supply room. Turned off the lights downstairs and was groping blind to the cot there. *Wham! I saw something!*"

Morlake glanced crookedly at Storm. "Bears out my theory," he murmured. "Eyestrain, fatigue, afterimage—the three musketeers of ghostland. Add general chuckle-headedness, careless observation, emotional hysteria. You probably bumped your head on something in the dark and saw stars." He stopped, squinted at Storm's pale face, and grew suddenly concerned. "Well, let's have it. What did you imagine you saw?"

Storm's forehead wrinkled with concentration. "It can't be described. It was dark, remember. The thing was faintly luminous, as if it fluoresced at some barely visible wavelength, just inside or outside the range of human vision. There was outline, enclosing a dark something. Not solid, exactly. Curiously geometric, like an arrangement of interlocking puzzle boxes. You got the feeling that it was not an object you saw, but a kind of three-dimensional shadow, vaguely luminous. What could cast such a weird shadow?"

Morlake was sober now, pale. "Language is a feeble thing to describe the inhabitants of the mental borderlands. You say Redfield took a picture?"

"I confiscated it." Storm extended a 5" x 7" enlargement, and Morlake studied the glossy print with growing interest.

"It looks just like those optical illusion diagrams," he remarked in a strained voice. "The kind of thing which reverses as you stare at it; first off, it looks like a solid seen from the outside, then like a hollow, reverse-block of the same shape. Your ghost has got himself in a box, Storm. I'm laughing at him, not you. He's in a blind alley. I think I can rout

him out for you. But not now. I have to finish a couple of experiments first. And I want to put my notes in order for that paper. There's someone waiting for me. I'll see you tomorrow and explain your ghost for you. . . ."

Morlake had gone then, with a few cryptic comments on the nature of his coming paper, the lateness of the hour, and the futility of studies in parapsychology. For the life of him, Storm could not remember an exact word said. There was a caustic hint that Frudey might be a mere figment of somebody's unpleasant imagination.

Half an hour later, when the watchman knocked at the door of the physics laboratory because the lights were on, there had been no answer. The classroom should have been empty, although Morlake had been working there sometimes until near dawn. A strange sound inside alarmed the watchman. The door was bolted on the inside and the passkey seemed no longer to fit the lock. Help was summoned when repeated knocks brought no answer, and the door was chopped down with a fire-axe.

There was the cyclotron, like a fat metallic monster. There was the empty room, the benches, shelves, sinks. The table with the spectrograph, and a battery of powerful microscopes. There were the closets of laboratory glassware, and a small electric furnace, with retorts and shapeless blobs of metal. There were the racks of specimens gathered by geology students. There was a moth-eaten felt banner with the legend "Northside." The door to the target chamber of the cyclotron hung open.

Inside was a bottle of whiskey and a pack of cards.

There was no sign of Dr. Simon Morlake, and no one had seen him since. Prolonged search proved fruitless, and the incident of the bolted door made explanation difficult. . . .

CHAPTER TWO

World of the Unreal

THE AIR was charged, oppressive, and behind piled cloudbanks of sinister purple flickered invisible lightning. The building showed a cliff-face of glass and aluminum, catching and reflecting the ugly flare of sunset. Tense, uneasy, troubled, Storm headed for the Physics building. He was not certain what he would do when he reached the place, but instinct urged him toward the basement workshops. Perhaps contact with the apparatus with which Morlake had been working might stimulate thought, or memory.

If only he could recall something significant that Morlake had said that last afternoon. Memory nagged at him. . . .

Two bulky figures fell into step beside him. Irritably, he was aware of Frazier and Redfield. Storm would have avoided the meeting had choice been given him; he was in no mood for undergrad chitchat.

"Grapevine has it that you're investigating for the faculty, investigating Morlake's disappearance. Right, Prof?"

"No," Storm answered. Frazier had the gift for causing annoyance to the younger faculty members, by calling attention to their lack of pedagogical dignity. "I'm not. Not that it makes any difference. There's nothing to investigate."

"Not supposed to talk, huh?" guessed Redfield. "That's silly. Everybody knows he did a bunk. Old Frudey finally got his goat."

Frazier grunted. "I don't believe that. Any leads, Prof?"

Storm stopped and confronted the pair. Frazier and Redfield were two of nature's noblest extroverts; no hint would penetrate their rhino-hide protective shells, nor have any effect on their juvenile sensibilities. Direct action was indicated.

"For your information, I'm not investi-

gating anything. If Dr. Morlake has disappeared, there is probably a good reason for it. I don't know anything about it. I teach mathematics, not amateur detection. Haven't you anything better to do than hang around and dig up possible gossip?"

"Not a thing better, at the moment," Redfield responded with amiable blankness. "If you're not investigating, you won't mind if we come along with you. I'd like to pick up those pix of mine you went south with. Mind?"

Storm minded definitely. But it was useless to argue. He shrunk away from any further jousting with the inevitable. The faculty and Frudey had been enough for one day.

Frazier's shock of strawlike hair stood up, glinting in the sunlight, like some impossible crested helmet. "Be a sport, Prof. Maybe if we nose around, we might get some ideas. Si Morlake was a good guy. I was working with him, assisting. I might know more than most people. I do know what he was doing, or trying to do."

Storm shrugged; the presence of Frazier and Redfield would be no aid to concentration, but he resigned himself. In silence, they ascended the geometric, semicircular steps to the building's main floor. Through angled doors they entered a corridor tiled in red-marbled, soundless rubber. A flight of curving stairs, railed in a swooping unfinished curve of aluminum, led downward. In a soft flush of concealed lighting, the basement hallway split the lower floor in half.

The fourth doorway on the left gave entrance to a modern chamber of horrors. It was the room housing the cyclotron, the micro spectrograph, directional Geiger counters, a cloud-chamber, a battery of ordinary high-power microscopes, and a fabulous electron-microscope. For a small college, Northside was unusually well-endowed, especially in curious Twentieth Century instruments for delving into the Unknowable.

Still blocking the entrance, its blank face of polished mahogany split and shattered, was the door which had been bolted on the inside. Wrenched awry, it hung crookedly on tortured hinges.

Stratified silence hung in the basement corridor like layers of invisible smoke. Storm tugged at the door. It moved, lower edge squealing viciously on the tilting. They entered.

Nothing in the room had been touched, nothing moved, in case later developments would prove need for fingerprints. In the open chamber of the cyclotron were still the bottle of whiskey and the pack of cards.

"Don't tell me Morlake was trying to activate good Bourbon!" said Redfield in mock horror.

"No, that wasn't it," explained Frazier aimlessly. "He had a lot of things he was trying out. I worked with him at first, but I was getting behind in other studies. Frudey put the heat on and I had to give up wacky non-essentials . . . like atoms and ESP—you know, extra-sensory perception. Morlake was bugs about it and said I was an ideal subject for him. Two reasons. The dice, first. I could shoot ten sevens in a row. He was as excited as a puppy over that, and as eager to believe as a kid asking about Superman or Santa Claus. I hadn't the heart to enlighten him. The dice were mine—loaded. He'd have seen it in a fluoroscope, but it didn't occur to him to check. The other reason was. I'm a blond."

Storm's interest picked up, but he was relieved of asking the obvious question by Redfield's suddenly coy nonsense: "He liked blonds?"

Blushing, Frazier stammered. "Not that at all. Blondes have funny vision. A blond's eyes are sometimes sensitive to ultraviolet light in wavelengths invisible to other people. I was. Morlake said the range of my vision into ultraviolet was extraordinary. Si Morlake had a lot of wacky ideas, but some were interesting.

I got involved in ESP, because I was wondering about applying telekinesis to football. What I could do with a ball that would come when I whistled, even if it were already in flight. . . ."

Frazier's words ran out, his eyes glazed, grew distant, as the possibility of using teleportation or telepathy in sports lured his thoughts out of continuity.

"You say you knew what he was trying to do?" Storm broke in sharply. "Surely it was not . . . football?"

Frazier grinned. "No, hardly that. Something about co-existing atoms. I didn't get all of it, naturally. He was trying things out on me, like trying them on a dog. Called me by a Latin name, a dog's name, I think—*Fidus Achates*. But he didn't expect me to respond or pay any more attention than a dog would, if you talked to it. He talked as if the world were a tangle of extended dimensions, a kind of interlocking puzzle box, with other planes of space and matter co-existing with ours, kind of parallel. Not a new idea in theory. Morlake's approach was different. Original and ingenious. Nothing like analogy or pure speculative mathematics. He wanted to see and feel these other worlds. Said it was quite possible."

"Go on," urged Storm, intrigued.

"IT WAS Dr. Adrian's experiments with the cyclotron that put Morlake on the track of what he wanted. Morlake was helping when Adrian bombarded carbon with three-hundred-eighty million volt particles of helium, trying to produce mesons, the secondary cosmic ray particles. It was not the experiment, itself, that interested Morlake, but some unexpected side results. There was talk that the use of the cyclotron was affecting people's vision in the region. If you'll remember, there were a lot of complaints. Arnold got upset, you know Prexy, and worried for fear public opinion might force the

college to suspend operating the cyclotron. It didn't. Whatever effect the experiments had was short-lived, and furor died down. Prexy forgot about it, and when Adrian got a lot of publicity for his photographed results, Prexy was there as usual to elbow his way in and grab the bows.

"Everybody forgot about the complaints, everybody—except Morlake. He seemed as fascinated about 'em as he was about my dice throwing sevens in a row. He went and talked to people, by pretending he was a reporter or adjuster for the insurance people. There had been talk of lawsuits, remember. The people were eager to talk. Said their eyes blurred, half-seeing things that weren't there.

"Well, that was it. Morlake claimed that the cyclotron had affected vision, temporarily. He said our cyclotron was a freak, a one in a thousand chance. That it extended the range of vision both ways, into the ultraviolet and the infrared, and that people could see things which weren't normally visible. That the things they thought they saw were there all the time, but invisible to normal eyesight. Then Morlake thought that other senses might be affected equally. Vision first since it was more sensitive, and something you'd notice quicker. Hearing, smell, touch—then he said a crazy thing. He wondered what our first taste of the New World would be like. He called the invisible worlds around us his New World, the final frontier of mystery. He said someday we'd see and hear and smell and feel it, maybe even taste it. Forbidden fruit, he said, might be bitter to the taste. After Adrian left, Morlake kept toying with the cyclotron, to see if he could enhance its effects on people in range. That's all I know."

Darkness grew swiftly in the basement room. Outside, the threatening storm broke. There was wind, with rain and hail in it; wind that shrieked and howled

and drummed phantom fingers on the slanted windowpanes. Near trees and bushes, visible above the window wells, threshed wildly as if angry monsters rent a way through them.

Storm was thoughtful as he moved toward the light-switch. When the time came, Frazier would have to repeat his story to the police. In the meantime, Storm tried to organize his thoughts. Absently, he flipped the switch. Fluorescents blinked, flickered and flared blindingly, then exploded. Burst tubes fell in jingling shower to the floor. In the darkness, Storm groped to a bench and sat down. He swore briefly.

A shadow moved against the lighter shadow-pool of fragmentary glass. Redfield was stooping over.

"Don't touch it," Storm warned. "You can get a nasty poisoning from the tube-coating if you cut yourself." He came to a sudden decision. "Redfield, you go call the police. I'll take responsibility. Tell them to send a couple of detectives, intelligent ones if they have any. Too much time has gone by now. Someone should have called in the authorities before this. The police won't like it, but there has to be an investigation. The sooner the better. We'll wait for you here. On your way back, stop by the supply room and bring in replacement tubes for the lights. Get going."

Astonished, Redfield grunted, but he

complied without comment. The sound of his departure diminished with distance.

In the darkness, with the froth of wind outside, and the restless seething toss of branches making an uproar of confused sound, Storm felt growing uneasiness. It increased by leaps and bounds.

Storm spoke to Frazier, raising his voice to battle the cry of turbulent elements. "You say Morlake chose you to assist him . . . because your vision extended into the ultraviolet ranges. Did you ever see anything?"

The reply was an embarrassed chuckle. "Did I? I think I was to blame for the rumor this place is haunted. I mentioned it to Redfield. He hung around one night, to take pictures. You know what he got—"

"I saw them," Storm corrected grimly. "I don't know what they were. Morlake seemed to know. I showed the prints to him. . . ."

There was a burst of sound. The hall door moved suddenly on its wrenched hinges. Moved as if a blast of compressed air struck it, hurling the door shut with extreme violence. Probably an outer door had been opened, causing a draft. Outside, wind raved and moaned.

Storm thought it might be Redfield returning. He strode to the door, tried the knob. The slamming had jammed it tightly, the frame creaked under pressure, but the door resisted movement. Storm braced himself, got a shoulder

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against the wood, and shoved with all his strength.

"Give me a hand," Storm called to Frazier. There was odd, sharp, gasping cry in the darkness. It sounded as if someone were strangling. The cry came again, muffled.

Storm turned. Something was happening to the room. It should have been dark, illuminated sharply at irregular intervals by the flash of lightning. Instead, it glowed.

It glowed in patterns, geometric patterns which shifted and swirled, as if objects melted and flowed like the figures in a Dali painting, becoming something quite different from whatever they at first seemed. Curious movement pulsed through the arrangement of forms, as if numerous panes of transparent glass bore luminous designs, and the panes were shifted in a regular order of motion. Shadowy relationships changed constantly.

While Storm's brain tried to adjust itself to this illusion, his body continued its effort to force open the door to the hall. Something yielded with a sensation that the world was breaking apart. The door gave way.

His body careened through the opening. He tripped and fell, flinging his arms forward to break the fall.

As if from a tremendous distance, he heard voices. Frazier and Redfield. . . .

His ears clung to the sound, as one clings desperately to the symbols of familiar things in a dream world.

Gray darkness swallowed him. For immeasurable intervals of time, he floated, bodiless, with no sensation of falling, or of being supported. Then, without warning, he sprawled headlong.

OUTFLUNG hands encountered an unfamiliar, jagged surface. He struck hard, rolling. Dazed, he sat up, conscious of bruised and abraded skin. Clothing felt damp, sticky, cling-

ing. He raised one injured hand to evaluate its damage.

The hand was part of nightmare. It was a hideous thing of jumbled angles and curving planes. Its color was wrong dreadfully wrong. His brain refused to translate the vibrations into familiar color ideas.

He was in a strange place, part of a dream world, but not a pleasant part. It was someone else's dream world, not his. Storm scrambled to his feet and looked about. Vision was limited. The glaring light poured from unseen sources, illuminating little and distorting what it revealed. He stood on a bare, rocky slope and the surface about him was textured with minute pitting effects. A swirl of luminous fog drifted everywhere and seemed to cling loosely to the nearer shadows.

There was no other way to describe the bulky forms obscured by the mist. Even those close at hand resembled nothing previously known. Outlines wavered, one could not be sure of solidity.

Storm dared not look too closely at his own body. Patches of it which thrust into his line of vision, were utterly wrong; disturbingly wrong. Storm tried to concentrate, and found that even thought was difficult, distorted. He must have struck his head in falling. That was a possible solution, but too easy. Unconvincing. This was unreal. He should pinch himself and wake up. But he was not sleeping. Moments ago—

But was he sure of that? Time seemed to have telescoped, as it sometimes does in dreams. Recent events were blurred, confused, unreal. Sometime, in another world, something had happened. Storm was no longer sure what had even happened, when, or where. He was here. The surroundings were new, strange, different.

He heard voices. Familiar voices. One was calling his name, repeating the sound

over and over. Storm had difficulty recognizing the alien syllables as a symbol pertaining to him.

Two shadows detached themselves from the indefinite background. They moved toward him in an odd drifting motion, completely unlike walking. They glided in a series of jerks and swoops. After an interval, they were close. But everything about them was strange. The form was human, but blurred, shadowy, and there were ugly hints of luminous geometric outlines of something else. What he saw seemed only a shadow cast into solids. Two shadows.

It was like that *thing* he had seen before in the Physics Building and mentioned to Morlake. Everything came rushing back upon him. Memory and identity fused into a whole. He was John Storm. He remembered the school and Morlake, the faculty and the students, sudden flashing details about himself. The rush of memory should have changed the world back into familiar pattern, but it remained as before.

He staggered and felt ill, weak, more confused by the recalled knowledge than he had been before.

Again the voices. They sounded like Redfield's and Frazier's. But they seemed hardly voices at all. He could *see* them. Like waves expanding in a pool from a dropped stone, the voices were shimmering, expanding globes of transparent luminosity. He was aware of direction in the effect, as if the globes distorted in his direction in the effect, as if the globes distorted in his direction, bent and converged toward him.

"It is always like this at first," said Frazier. "Don't strain too hard. You will adjust to it. I've come so far before. . . ."

What did it mean? Had Morlake opened a gateway in the Known and stumbled into the nightmare world of the Unknown?

CHAPTER THREE

The Shadow Beings

STORM stared at the shadows. His eyes screamed with pain; glaring light probed his eyeballs, got inside his skull, twisting his brain. Waves of nausea paralyzed all perception of distance, of relation, of reality. . . .

He spoke, the words reaching out like undulating ribbons of light. "You—have—been—here—before?"

Again, spheres of rippling color expanded. Ears and brain tingled.

"Not exactly. A glimpse or two. Morlake was afraid to expose me to unknown danger. I said he was a good guy. He took the risk himself. He came exploring twice. Told me about it. This time he did not return. Something must have happened."

Resentment and anger made Storm momentarily speechless. It was cruel and unfair. He had been trapped by a stupid plot. But was it intentional? Had Frazier known, or suspected, what might happen? What had happened?

Anger burned itself out suddenly. What had happened? He put the question in words, amazed by the visible phenomena which accompanied sound.

The reply was ironic, bitterly humorous. "Nothing—really. You just think so."

Storm started a savage protest.

Frazier went calmly on. "The doors gave way before you, and you fell into the hall. If you hadn't turned around to see what was happening, you would still be there. But you were convinced that you were somewhere else. So you are. The mind creates some force which translates even your physical body to a different plane. You haven't gone anywhere, in terms of time and space. These other, unknown worlds co-exist with ours, parallel, perhaps on a different vibration level. I don't pretend to understand all

of it. I'm just guessing. Morlake rarely explained; he dropped a few hints, and I'm trying to make sense of them.

"He said our eyes catch a lot of things that our brains don't believe. The brain is a strainer, filtering out the parts of any sensations relayed to it which are not pertinent to our accepted existence. Lots of people see these related worlds. Some of them are very close, really visible to us. People see ghosts only if they are 'in tune'—which means tired, or in a trance-like state with conscious judgment set aside for the moment. The ghosts are always there to see, if our minds let us see them.

"The cyclotron has a leak somewhere. It's a freak, Morlake says. Some energy-form released or generated by it can be stored in the air or 'the ether'—and, given certain conditions, will heighten normal perceptions. It may affect the organs of sight, smell and taste directly, or the nerves relaying perception, or even the brain itself. Touch and hearing are not so easily hurt or stimulated. Maybe they function according to a different vibration pattern, coarser; or maybe the brain has to be convinced first, and will then translate sensations of touch and hearing into new terms. I don't know. But *something* would happen to anyone if he were around that particular cyclotron for any length of time.

"Whatever the energy is, it diminishes in time, but gradually. It functions chiefly in the dark. Ordinary octaves of visible light seem to cancel out its effect. You know how some odors will blanket ultraviolet light. There is a clash—I know because the fluorescents burst like that several times while Dr. Adrian was operating the cyclotron. Probably it works like sounding a note in music that is exactly tuned to the critical vibration level of a glass or mirror. It shatters."

Storm saw an objection, made it. "But Dr. Adrian was working with the cyclo-

tron more than anyone else. He saw nothing."

Frazier laughed harshly. "Do you *know* that? His wife died very suddenly. But did he have to take her body east? I think he was scared, running away. Probably thought his mind was cracking."

A thought occurred to Storm. "Did you plan all this? Was I deliberately trapped into coming with you?"

"No," came the reply. "Remember, you were coming here yourself. We merely came along. We intended to anyhow. You made it easy for us. Besides, I wasn't sure anything would happen this time."

"You should have warned me," Storm rebuked angrily.

"Would you have listened? Would you have believed me? You'd have demanded facts, explanations, proofs. I had nothing but wild guesses."

"I'll believe you now. The question is, how do we get out of here?"

Frazier's voice was stubborn, brutally matter of fact, blunt. "We don't," he said. "Not till we find Morlake. Someone has to look for him. He's in trouble—or he'd have returned. We can't get out unless he shows us a way. I don't know of any. . . ."

In silence, Storm digested the grim facts of the situation. Finally, he said, "How do we go about finding him? Any ideas?"

The shadows moved, drifting closer in that stiff, staggering glide.

"Stand right where you are," warned Frazier. "Don't move. We need a base of operation."

Storm held himself rigidly immovable. He glanced about, trying to force his mind to relax, to accept the rules and standards of unreality. It was like a curiously solid, inescapable dream. He was in a world without perspective, visual or mental. There was no horizon, only limiting, obscuring fog. Within range of sight was

no familiar outline, no bulk of recognizable form, no object which could be exactly labelled.

Redfield spoke: "I was just outside the door, waiting to see what happened. I did not go for the police. As you fell, you vanished. We had trouble getting through, finding the right plane. There are a lot of them. We might never have found you. It was just luck. Even then, we couldn't be sure. You were hard to— to identify."

The shadows ranged themselves beside Storm. One of them touched him. The sensation was oddly normal, reassuring.

"Stop fighting it, Prof." said Frazier. "It's not so bad. But you still don't quite believe it. So you aren't completely through. The worst part is being caught between two dimensions. You've got to accept it. One illusion is very like another. Accept it, and it works . . . at least as far as you are concerned."

"Sure, Prof.," answered Redfield. "Establishing a beachhead is never fun. I know. But it's better to hit the sand and dig yourself a hole in it than to stand outside, getting your feet wet."

It was Roman counsel; strong, tough-minded, but good if you could take it. Storm remembered that both Frazier and Redfield were G.I. students. They knew something about beachheads. After all, this was one, really, a beachhead into the unknown.

The same rules might apply.

The thought was comforting. Storm had been unaware of his own strangling suspicion that no rules would apply. He relaxed and the light grew stronger, more compelling. Some of the blurring mist cleared. Objects stood out more sharply. The two near shadows were more obviously human, but with disturbing overtones of color and a wavering luminosity of outline.

They were men.

SLOWLY at first, then with a rush, surroundings changed. He stood on a steep slope of bare, jagged rock. There was no sign of weathering, nothing but a blank surface of grainy-textured grav, incredibly rough and pointed like a vastly magnified picture of some abrasive compound. Frazier and Redfield solidified, like a motion picture coming into focus.

"That's better," approved Frazier. He fished a coil of fine, tough nylon cord from his pocket and bent to attach it firmly to a projection of rock. "I hope this serves us better than it did Dr. Morlake. He used it the first two times, and came back. I found this on a bench in the shop. Maybe he forgot it, unless he had another like it. This is the starting point; we'll have to find our way back to it. Or—"

He shrugged. It was necessary to complete the thought.

Paying out the cord, Frazier cautiously descended the slope. Storm followed, and Redfield brought up the rear. Time lost all substance. They seemed hours going down a long, slanting shelf of featureless gray rocks. Light waxed and waned. At times, the gray surface lost appearance of solidity, became crystalline, transparent, and they seemed to hang suspended in a titanic abyss of empty space. Again the footing clouded, resumed its original appearance.

Despite the intensity of light, it was like walking in thick darkness. Storm collided with things which were not there, bulks too diffuse to refuse his passage, but which yielded reluctantly under pressure. Invisible semi-solids, which seemed alive, or at least capable of movement, clung about him, resisting, like blobs of very dense gas. It required definite exertion to move against the vague pressure.

He was breathing heavily, and became slowly aware of alien tastes and smells in the atmosphere. Vague whisperings came and went about him. He grew confused.

It seemed they had changed directions, but the slope still angled steeply downward. Surrounding pressures eased slightly, and they went more swiftly.

Abruptly the slope broke into a steep and dangerous descent. Loose rock rolled beneath his groping foot, rolled and fell and rattled, then dropped into the silence of free fall. For a full minute it fell, then came an echoing crash far below. Straining his eyes until corkscrews seemed to revolve in his brain, Storm made out details of a cliff face which plunged almost sheer to a dark valley.

There were shadows below, many shadows. Dark shadows that moved restlessly like the patterns wind draws on a field of dry, waving grain. They moved in heaving billows, in irregular tossing swirls. But like the grain, they moved as if somehow attached at one end to a solid, unmoving surface.

Of that fearful descent, Storm could remember little. Down they went, and down, clawing for handholds, reaching blindly below for crevice or cranny in which to wedge feet aching with fatigue. At one place they locked hands to catch other's ankles and lowered themselves as on a living rope. None too soon, they reached the valley floor.

Here, the light was very bad. Even objects near at hand were so "distorted and so difficult to see clearly" that Storm doubted the sureness of his footing. Progress became a groping for solidity across treacherous, uneasy ground. Had it not been for a constant flicker of vague lights and shadows, they would have moved like blind men, tapping the surface each time before putting a foot down. Near the ground were curious currents, almost like invisible running water, which tugged at feet and legs.

Still paying out the nylon cord, Frazier thrust his way ahead.

"That must be a long cord," Storm growled.

"Not so long," came the sharp answer. "Distance is different here. Either space itself, or our perception of it, is warped. I remember Morlake saying something about that after his first trip. You'll find how far it seems when we try to go back."

If we ever go back," muttered Storm.

Redfield pressed forward to Storm's side, thrusting a solid small bulk toward him.

"I brought my service revolver," Redfield said. "If it will make you feel better, Prof, you carry it."

Storm rejected the offer. "Keep it. I wouldn't know how to use it."

"What do they teach people in schools?"

Frazier laughed. The sound was hideously distorted, like a caricature of laughter. They plodded on in silence.

In the valley shadows were denser, more substantial. Even the atmosphere hung heavy, and there was sharp tang in the nostrils and stinging in the lungs as one breathed. It was stimulating but nerve-wracking. Smell identified it as ozone, or something similar; and ozone in sufficient concentration can be toxic. The thought was not pleasant to Storm, but mired in a mixture of embarrassment and hot resentment, he did not mention it to the others.

They trod aisles in a forest of crystal shafts where odd lights moved and beckoned, and soft colors glowed. On the ground were the moving patterns of light and dark, like shadows of invisible living forms. Storm did not like to think about what beings might cast such shadows. In another place, where darkness thickened and sound grew into a vast outpouring of wierd harmonies, the shadows stirred and some stood upright like solid bodies. Bodies which moved in response to what might have been fluctuations in the music, bobbing, nodding, swaying sometimes in unison, sometimes singly again the whole mass spinning in the mad

gyrations of a group dance. Always there was an appearance of intelligent violation, a hideous lifelike quality of controlled movement.

The shadows were three dimensional, but utterly unhuman. It was a mathematical nightmare, with every form known to geometric science. Cubes, cylinders, cones, pyramids, irregular many-faceted blocks. If solids they were immeasurably elastic, expanding into grotesque elongations, foreshortening into dwarfed, bulging blobs, always transparent, or at least translucent, but distorting light strangely as it flowed through them.

Utter weariness weighed down Storm. Movement became almost mechanical. He trudged as one does in endless nightmare, and there was an illusion of repetition in everything he did.

Mind and muscles revolted at once. From sheer exhaustion he stopped and refused to continue the hopeless task.

"This nonsense has gone far enough," he said defiantly. "We don't stand a chance to find Morlake. If there are infinite planes, as you say, he may be on any one of them. We don't know that he's on this one. I must have been crazy to come this far."

Frazier and Redfield stared at him. They looked like badly photographed motion pictures.

"I guess you're right," admitted Frazier hopelessly. "The line has run out anyhow. We can find where we were all right. But what then? It's not like opening a door. We don't know how to get out."

Following the cord, reeling it up as they went, Frazier led the way back toward the cliff. He stopped, so suddenly that Storm, following close^a behind, bumped into him. Frazier held up the end of the cord. It seemed to have been burned in two. In widening circles, panic mounting, they searched for the opposite end. A few oddly scorched and raveling

fragments were found. Redfield touched one and screamed. It had burned like a hot wire. There was no sign of a continuing cord.

THE THREE stood and looked at one another. Catastrophe was beyond comment. Redfield shrugged, rubbed injured fingers on his coat.

"We can't stay here," he said dismally.

Selecting a direction at random, he started walking. The others followed.

Fear strained itself through Storm's consciousness. Loss of the guiding cord seemed to cut him adrift. The nodding and waving shadows had disturbed, but without frightening him. They seemed too evanescent, too insubstantial, unreal. But being lost in this utter strangeness was terrifying. Panic rang in his brain like the muted vibrations of a cracked bell. He felt compelling urge to run, but there was no place to run. In all the pervading grayness, there was no hiding place.

Redfield strode swiftly, as if he sought escape from the terror which dogged all of them.

Light shifted rapidly, sliding up and down scaled octaves of illumination. It kept pace with their racing emotions, was keyed to the rising crescendo of stark fear. Surroundings also were altered subtly, becoming^b harsher, more stark and bleak of outline. Objects assumed tantalizing suggestion of familiar forms, but the illusion vanished quickly upon closer approach.

Shadows seemed to draw together behind them. The huddled things made gestures, dimly perceived, vaguely menacing. From all sides came a suggestion of whispering, of furtive, haunted urging. A feeling of deadly pursuit increased from an ugly suspicion into hideous certainty. Bodiless entities, seen only by the shadows they cast, were herding the three fugitives toward some unseen goal.

A defile opened ahead, revealing the

place to which the three were being driven.
A city!

CHAPTER FOUR

Dark Doorway

DESOLATE as the moon, a great plain stretched beyond visible distance. In a near wedge of it, thrusting like a salient into a jumbled mass of broken rock, was a cluster of huge, obviously artificial structures. It must be a city. There were ruins of towering semisolid walls, a tangle of twisted buildings, a maze of threading streets, some partially blocked with curious rubble. In the center, overpowering the disorderly mass of the city, rose gigantic cones, taller by far than the highest surrounding piles.

Light played over the cones, weaving webs of lightnings from apex to apex. The cones themselves were glowing cores of vivid white, but color crawled upon the surfaces. Color, which broke and flowed in constantly changing patterns, melting, resolving, running through complete spectrums and suggesting invisible spectrums beyond. There was sound, sound which seemed integral with the color, sound which flowed with it in audible patterns, which ranged its own spectrums and vanished into contorted and nerve-straining vibrations beyond hearing. It was as if one had struck an accidental chord upon some great color organ, blending harmonies and dissonance into a cluster of tones at once beautiful and maddening to hear.

Like a sheet of glimmering water, light moved outward from the city, enveloped the men who stood too stunned to move—and drew them swiftly into the very confines of mystery.

Things moved about the city, things which cast multiform and monstrous shadows of their being. . . .

In that intolerable light and sound, planes shifted oddly, readjusted. It was like a book of colored pictures, flipped through so rapidly that impressions flowed, fused, became moving patterns in a new and startlingly different order of reality. It was like blindness resolving into the world of light, vision so stark and painful, so hideous that Storm cringed, writhing in instinctive denial.

It was then that he first saw the . . . inhabitants.

If the shadows had suggested nightmare, the reality was beyond nightmare. It was sheer horror, mathematical in form, luminous, living—intelligent.

The frightening part was the perception, instantaneous and complete, of alien intelligence. Had they been mindless beings, creatures of mere existence, he could have stood the utter loathing which rocked his being. But these . . . these had mind and will, strong, alert, contemptuous, interested. Not cruel; emotionless, but with unbounded curiosity. . . .

Storm felt like an impaled insect, being examined. For a timeless interval, he felt the idle probing of alien intelligence, he felt the searching thrust of curious thought against his; it was like the touch of sharp but delicate instruments. He was held high, wriggling, poked and jabbed by thin beams of light, while he strove to blank out his mind against the cold insolence of examination.

There was a moment of baffled indecision, followed by curious emotions which he sensed indistinctly, too unfamiliar to identify.

Then he was being flung carelessly aside.

There was a familiar sensation, recognized instantly. He was grateful for the familiarity. But it was pain, sheer outrage of physical pain. Mercifully, he lost consciousness. . . .

Awakening brought further doubt of sanity. He was lying on a hard surface

in comparative darkness. He was bound by invisible but solid lines of force. Someone bent over him, fumbling at the network which secured him. It was Morlake.

"Quiet," said Morlake. "They threw us together to see what reactions we would have. Don't give anything away."

"You—saw—them?"

"Oh, yes. A good deal more of them than you did. They're not what you think. Or maybe they are, I don't know. I believe each one of us sees them differently; each brain translates their appearance into something related to itself, its training. The real appearance may be something else again."

"I saw cubes and pyramids and cylinders and gemlike figures with facets reflecting light."

"Then I was right. They are too alien even for perception in the ordinary sense. You imagined mathematical figures. It was an escape for your brain into terms of familiar reality. We strain vision through preconceived ideas, as a protection to sanity. Here there is no sanity—but theirs. They're sane enough, intelligent, even wildly curious about us. They've tried to learn from me about our world, where we came from, what it's like, what people are like—above all, how we got here. They're too damn' curious about that. The possibilities frighten me—"

"You should have thought of that before," Storm reproved.

"Good Lord, man! I didn't create this place. It was here before I stumbled on

it. With the cyclotron operating, anyone could have blundered here, anytime. Such things are bound to happen. With all the gadgets we've dreamed up, most of them imperfectly understood, mankind is asking for trouble. We don't know what happens when we start cooking with atoms; it's highly probable that we'll unlock a lot of doors, doors that open blindly into the unknown. This is one. The cyclotron is a freak, but there may be others like it. Who knows? Blindness first—the groping and blundering—then the terrible vision. If it's only a vision, we're lucky. . . ."

Morlake stopped, his voice strange with passion.

"I'm no better than the rest," he went on. "I looked into the darker mental closets behind our ghosts and found ugly reality. But you can't shut all the closet doors. Man is too curious. But other things—these or others—may be equally curious. The barriers of mind are too thin. The barriers of matter scarcely exist. We are only pioneers in a new field of exploration. Others will follow, very soon, one way or another. Even if we get back and try to warn them of what we have found—"

Storm remembered saying something, but his mind was not working clearly. Shock of his experience had been too great.

Then Morlake was talking again, swiftly, as if time ran through his fingers.

"Getting out is fairly simple. I'm surprised you didn't think of it. Go back to your point of initial contact. I'm sure

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Frazier can find the way. He's good at orientation. You'll have to find the two of them. They were brought here, as you were. I don't know where, and haven't time to look. *They'll come for me soon. It's a matter of mental adjustment, helped by the li—"*

Words faded into curious rustling hiss. Fainter and fainter as if distance separated him from the source of the sound. Then Storm was conscious of supreme mental effort by Morlake. Sound came again, revolving into speech; but the syllables were flat and metallic, run together.

"Don't think about me. Escape . . . if you can. Smash the cyclotron . . . as if accident. I stayed to learn something which may help out . . . if . . ."

That was all. Morlake was gone.

THE cell was small, like the hollow interior of a cone. It had never been intended for human occupancy. Weak and shaken, Storm moved about, exploring. He seemed free. In the dimness he reached out and felt a tangle of something like invisible cords.

Above the floor, on one slanting side of the cone, was a spot of lighter darkness. As Storm investigated, he found it to be an oval aperture which expanded as he moved toward it, shrank as he backed away, operating according to his proximity in a manner that suggested a door opening and closing to the control of an electric eye. With an animal's fear of a trap, Storm eyed the oval dubiously. It seemed the only possible exit. He would have to risk it.

Outside was a constantly curving hallway, which wandered up and down and sidewise, with no apparent direction or intention. He followed it cautiously. Off the hallway, opened many cells similar to the one he had vacated. They were all alike, all empty. In any man-made structure, the waste of space would have been criminal—unless here there were more

dimensions than three, with consequent variant ideas about space.

It was a vast hive of cone-like cells; the passageways endless complicated warrens which roved aimlessly at the whims of alien designers. Some ended abruptly at blank walls that might be no barriers to the inhabitants. There was the intricate and meaningless unreality of dreams. It was a maze without pattern or conceivable plan.

Hosts of faint, floorbound shadows swayed and gestured about him. But now their urging whispers and rustlings seemed friendly, worried, warning. . . .

They were as frightened as he.

Storm stopped and tried to grasp at meaning in the half-sounds. But the sound itself was illusory; as fragmentary and unrelated as the mindless patter of wind-stirred leaves.

He went on.

In another cell, bound by the invisible cords, were Frazier and Redfield. Both seemed dazed or asleep. They roused, reluctantly, as he worked over them. They stared at him with dazed, uncomprehending eyes.

Words came unsteadily, vaguely, as if minds worked sluggishly and resisted stimulus. At his insistence, the men stood up and followed him, moving as if drugged or in hypnotic trance.

In an immense, soaring room, built on the lines of an ellipsoid, hollow and filled with brilliance of flaky light and chiming sound, they found Morlake.

He still lived, after a dreadful fashion. Mounted on a frame of luminous solidity he had apparently been the object of extreme curiosity. The body was turned inside out, and things hideous to see had been done with dispassionate skill at vivisection. Beings, whatever they were, still milled about and hovered over the glowing framework in attitudes of detached impersonal interest. Figures like involved intricacies of intersecting planes; other

figures like solids composed of jumbled assemblies of angles difficult to resolve into individual entities; figures that were the mathematics of nightmare—all whirled about in the eery gyrations of a dance of death.

In the madness that followed, clear impressions were impossible.

Redfield came suddenly alive. He fired bullet after bullet into the writhing obscenity which was Morlake—with no apparent effect, for the inhuman writhing continued.

There was a fearful outburst of sound, a blinding violence of light, exploding intolerably into brilliance beyond that of fissioning atoms. Cones shattered, and the showering uproar of their fragments was like a deluge of fragile glass.

As they fled through it, the city was crumbling in swift decay, building toppling, the walls shuddering, collapsing into oozing mass, the plain rocked and heaved, while lightnings raved overhead. In the narrow dark valley, the earthbound shadows danced and flapped and crackled like wind-whipped flames. Then they were climbing the precipice, scrambling endlessly upward, while loose rocks rolled and fell and clattered around them. The long slope upward was now ablaze with quivering livid flames, which licked at the fugitives, and strong, invisible currents flowed over their numbed feet, clinging, impeding, attempting to drag down and destroy them.

There was a cord at last, still attached to the projecting rock, its loose end smoldering as the hungry flames licked at it.

Gasping, the three flung themselves on the ground, hugging the hard-bought advantage, as condemned prisoners cling to a dwindling hope.

Fog swirled down and enveloped the exposed barren height. The harshly metallic sky leaned close, while rivers of lightning poured from it. After the

dazzling flashes of lightning came flowing soft darkness. Darkness, filled with a rustling and crackling and whispering, as if legions of ghosts besieged the mist-wreathed slopes. Groping blindly, Storm found his way to Frazier and Redfield, seized and held them firmly.

"The light," he whispered hoarsely. "That's the secret. If only there were some way to reach it—"

"The light! Of course," mumbled Frazier.

Temperature dropped rapidly. In a black, seething ocean of darkness, they huddled together. The ground stirred, heaved, moved uneasily beneath their feet.

"I remember now," Frazier cried wildly. "He always tied the cord first. Near the switch, so he'd know where to reach. If we had done that—"

Redfield groaned. "I'd got the replacement tubes, but I did not have time to fit them in. They're still out in the corri-



**You Can't Beat
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FOR ALL THINGS A PERSON TO CALLED LINGER

dor, leaning against the wall. What's the use?"

Horror became tangible. The mists thinned, and something like an army of shadows moved steadily, stealthily up the lower slopes.

Suddenly the darkness was riven. It split wide open as walls of brilliant light became a solid, expanding cube. Magically, the gray bleakness of pitted rock was erased. The advancing armies of shadows faltered, vanished.

There was a moment of awful suspension. Then falling. In a heap, the three tumbled into the corridor of the Physics building. The splintered door crashed heavily against the wall. Hinges gave way; unsupported, the door tottered and fell with shattering noise.

Silence hung in the corridor like layers of invisible smoke.

Light streamed from the doorway of the room housing the haunted cyclotron. It was blocked by a dark, solid silhouette. The watchman stood and blinked solemnly at the tangle of oddly disarrayed bodies on the floor. One stirred and sat up. It was Storm. He gasped, his face was red and swollen with exertion. The savage ferocity of his glance startled the watchman. The others were disentangling themselves noisily.

"That door will have to be replaced," said the watchman. "I must have missed you before. The lights were out for a while. I've replaced the tubes in here. I found them in the hall." He was crackling the corrugated boxes which had held fluorescent tubing; his thin hands were nervous and wrenched at the paper viciously as he went on.

"I came down to check. Thought maybe you'd be here. The police are upstairs. Want to talk to you. They've found Morlake."

"Morlake!" Storm's voice was completely dazed.

The watchman nodded. "Yes. Over

at the power plant. Nobody knows why he went there or when. Or how he got in. The body was across some exposed terminals. It was burned, "... almost beyond ..." the man gulped, "... almost beyond recognition."

Now on their feet, Frazier and Redfield exchanged glances with Storm—glances which bound all three to an unspoken conspiracy of silence. Someday—soon—something would happen to a cyclotron, an accident, unavoidable. He nodded binding himself to the pact.

Foot on the first step. Storm hesitated, nerved himself to look back. They were still standing as he left them, a tableau of suddenly frozen figures. The watchman crumpled the elongated hollow tubing of corrugated paper. Redfield had nervously put the revolver back in his pocket. Frazier looked as if he had been about to say something and then had thought better of it.

From above came the sound of Frudey's voice, shrill, angry, demanding. It would be like the faculty meeting, but worse. There would be more questions, still unanswerable, and he could never offer the truth—which was perhaps the worst possible solution of the mystery. Hand on the aluminum rail, Storm hesitated, dreading to go up and face the battery of alien and unfriendly eyes.

From the basement corridor, and from the vaultlike room beyond, opening off it through a wrenched and splintered frame doorway, came a faint sound.

It was a series of faint popping noises, followed by a jingling rain of fine particles of glass.

The doorway became a rectangle of darkness. Even before the luminous, geometric figures came swirling into the corridor, Storm knew that he would never again have to ascend into the world of reality.

At the bottom of the curving stairway, he waited. . . .

MISSIVES AND MISSILES



FOR some time now, many of you guys and gals have been sticking your necks out, making guesses about our identity—though a few have had the foresight to worry. The question most frequently asked of us is: "Are you a BEM?"

Now, how are you going to answer that? If we say yes, it's bound to lower the tone of the magazine—besides getting all our old cover artists hot on our trail again, just as we got 'em looking the other way. If we say no—who'll believe us?

Another question often asked us is: "Are you a BUM!" Is that a question?

But BEM or BUM, we love you. Whether this is wise, you will no doubt let us know. Just for now let us say that we have kicked around the field, often on the outskirts, some fifteen years. For much of this time it seemed wisest to hide our often inconsiderable glimmer under a bushel—now light dazzles us.

We've read, we've written, we've edited. We've got a calling name, but is it important? You might call us Jake—and we hope everything is with you, too—but keep in mind that if we took credit for the *Triple S*, it'd be grossly unfair to all of you who've written in to discuss stories, filled our *Opinion Tpllies* and generally made yourselves, not useful—but invaluable.

Why don't we just say that it takes a whale of a lot of people to put out a maga-

zine—and you're it? There're a couple of guys helping us here, too. And if *Triple S* gives you one half the kick your letters give us—why, your two bits is well spent.

If not—well, you may have heard the one about the guy who had both legs amputated.

He couldn't kick, either.

All of which brings us here and there. And now for your letters—

Dear Editor:

As a new-comer to the field of Science Fiction, I'd like to stick my two-bits' worth in and air my gripes and display my admiration for this science stuff.

To start off with, here's an excerpt from a news item in the November 11, '50 issue of *The Army Times*, a nationwide—yep, worldwide newspaper for servicemen. Caption: "SOLDIERS' READING TASTES CHANGE: TURN TO SCIENCE. FORT MONMOUTH, N. J. — . . . But the reading habits of the men have changed, according to Miss Margaretta Barr, chief post librarian. Mystery fiction and Western thrillers have been supplanted in favor by the science fiction story.

"In fact, this type of reading has become so popular at the installation, where some years ago Signal Corps scientists made contact with the moon by radar, that a separate science book section has been set up, and according to the librarians, probably is the first of its kind in the armed forces . . ."

Which only goes to prove that the Army isn't being missed by the current trend away from conlix and shoot-em' publications.

But to get back to your mag, I'd like to say something on the November '50 issue.

First place for all-around reading goes to Anderson's "Flight to Forever". There is a story really worth reading.

The story I read first, however, was "The Soul Makers", because of its catchy title.

(Continued on page 99)



Alone, he braved the terrors of the unknown, planted the first human footprint on the ageless surface of the moon . . . came back to tell the waiting Earth about it —and no one believed him!

HIGH FLIGHT

By KATHERINE MacLEAN

AT SIX years old Mike Berganholm wanted the moon. People say you get over things like that.

When Mike was in college he was a pretty bright student, but he graduated into a war. For six years he saw nothing much but shells, pontoon bridges, the entrails of stalled graders and the hind end of his monkey wrench.

There was a business slump going on when he came out of the Army. Jobs were scarce. Instead of waiting he took a high pay job as a mechanic and married on it. Then the slump passed and fresh green batches of students began graduating from colleges and getting first crack at the jobs. By that time Mike couldn't remember much engineering, and who would trust an engineer whose last job was as a mechanic?

He couldn't get anywhere that way, so he scraped up a loan and opened up a small machine shop. There he settled down, enjoying a reasonably happy life with a pretty wife, two young kids, and not much money.

NAVY MEN PREPARE TO REACH MOON—"aren't you going to eat, Mike?"

Her voice seemed to come from a great

distance. The last Mike had noticed, the kids had finished breakfast and Sally was shooing them off to school. They seemed to be gone now. It was time for Mike to be finishing breakfast. He glanced at an untouched platter of scrambled eggs and shoveled a few savory forkfuls into his mouth. His eyes wandered back to the newspaper item and he began reading it again.

NAVY MEN PREPARE TO REACH MOON

Tonight Navy officials declared that—

It was a Navy release on Project Moon Rocket and, like most Navy releases, was a mixture of glamor and secretiveness, but this much fact came through—the rocket was ready at last, and would go at the next favorable opportunity.

The rocket was ready. The next favorable time? Mike usually kept vague track of the relative positions of moon and earth. The next favorable time would be tonight at five-forty-five—he could calculate that much from the almanac item in a box on the same page. The rest of the week would be cloudy. This would be the only oppor-

The moon came at him with
incredible speed. . . .

tunity. This was the night of the take-off.

The rocket flight. Suddenly Mike wanted to see it, and the wish drowned common sense. One hundred miles up the ship would shed its step rockets. That sudden strange splitting into two parts; the last spurt of strength to hurtle the ship upward at escape velocity and then the dying and detaching of that huge belt of jets would be the most awesome sight, and the most delicate technical feat of the climb. Mike wanted pictures of that. No one was supposed to be able to take them, but he wanted them. He had a movie camera and an old Army surplus jet fighter plane. If he could make them do, the pictures might sell to a newsreel company. Could he make them do it?

"Aren't you going to work, Mike?" Sally's voice again.

He had the breakfast plates shoved aside and five hasty sketches roughed out along the edges of the newspaper. The old jet job, the Army F-180 war surplus, had come with auxiliary jets thrown in for a few dollars extra, boosters for high climbing. They were down in the cellar. He had the slide rule out of his pocket and was working the fuel weight-height formula. According to the computations he might be able to do it if he lightened ship, dropped his auxiliaries two thirds of the way up, used up all fuel on the climb and come down from the stratosphere dead stick.

It was almost suicide. Just barely possible by the slide rule. . . .

"Better hurry Mike, you'll be late." Sally standing beside the table, looking very pretty, very curious about what he was planning, pretending not to be interested. "Better hurry."

"Not going." He stood and stretched, "Call Jack for me, and tell him I won't be in today, will you, baby?" He headed for the back door, beginning the race against time.

In the back yard the old F-180 pointed its long shiny nose at the sky. Wheel-

marked grass grew lushly around it, testifying that the plane was not used very often. Mike circled it, plans taking shape and solidity in his mind. There were things to buy and things to rent, and a pressure suit would be lighter than the air pressure and heat controls of the cabin. He could rip them out. There was emergency wiring already built in to take care of heating the control panel.

THE MAN who rented him the suit was friendly and conversational, and overly interested in what Mike wanted it for.

"Going up to take pictures," Mike said. "What's the suit's pressure range? How much can it take?"

"Eight pounds to the square inch, I calculate. Enough for vacuum if you want. Want me to look up the safety factor?" The man's eyes glittered. "No chance of you wearing it near vacuum is there?" If he found out Mike's plans, he would probably not rent the suit.

"Not much," Mike said laconically, stowing it hastily in the back of his car and climbing into the creaking front seat. "Thanks anyhow."

He drove away hurriedly to pick up oxygen and helium breathing cylinders and fuel. He would have to test the suit himself. The soap-bubble test was old and simple. When he arrived home he took down Jimmy's bubble pipe solution from the kitchen shelf and diluted it with two quarts of water. Upstairs he could hear the sound of the vacuum cleaner.

Sally came down stairs and looked into the kitchen when he was half through testing the suit. "You're dripping water or the floor," she said. Her voice sounded distant and tinny through the earphones and again he saw that she was restraining her curiosity from questions, not wanting to butt in, and he was grateful.

He smiled at her through the narrow face plate. "Pour some on my back and watch for bubbles." Slowly he ran the pressur-

up to seven pounds relative. His eardrums tightened and he swallowed steadily to keep his eustachian tubes open and pressure-free. As the pressure climbed, the sound of his breathing and moving grew abnormally loud within the helmet, while the joints in his arms and legs tended to stiffen out, all except the left knee, which perversely showed a tendency to bend. The suit's joints were accordion pleated evenly on both sides to balance pressure push, but no pleating ever balanced perfectly. Mike walked up and down a little, getting used to the oddity. Sally sloshed water on the outside and watched carefully.

"No bubbles," she reported.

He released a valve, and pressure began to fall slowly.

"Anything else I can do, Mike?" Her curiosity surged up. "Where are you going in that thing?"

"Up to get some pictures of the space ship take-off." He smiled cheerfully, listening to his voice—too loud and close inside the helmet—and hearing the sudden irregular catch in the regular hiss of the filter bellows as they registered the telltale catch and shift in the regular rhythm of breathing which instinctively accompanies a lie, or a fear of the results of one's words. "I want some shots of the ship dropping its step rocket."

She knew more than he had expected. "That's pretty high, Mike, past the bottom of the ionosphere. It's hot up there, isn't it?"

"Not very," Mike mumbled, hoping she wouldn't remember radiation and ionization. "Atmosphere's pretty thin up there. Not much gas around to get hot."

She smiled. "Well look out for that first molecule—it's a scorcher!"

He saw with relief that she was kidding; she didn't think that there was anything to be afraid of.

As the pressure dropped the last few ounces to normal he felt a slight dizziness. Then the suit collapsed, deflated and

draped in baggy folds around his wrists and ankles, and Sally helped him take it off. Mike knew how a pressure suit would feel now. He set to work on the F-180 with a slight queasiness in his stomach.

The ionosphere would be hot. Not just temperature but ionization to build up unpredictable electrical charges within the instruments and upset their readings, and not just ionization, but hard radiation from the sun and space, cosmic rays to pierce his ship and generate secondary and dangerous radiation in the metals of the motor—and all he wanted was a few measly pictures just up a hundred miles. The guys he wanted to take pictures of were trying to go all the way. He would be a fine yellow-livered explorer if he couldn't even get high enough to watch.

He was working hard, loosening bolts and stripping off superfluous parts, removing unnecessary weight, trying to save every ounce of fuel. As he worked he weighed what he took off and entered it carefully in a notebook. The morning passed swiftly.

Sally came out and sat on the back steps watching his hair. When Mike leaned on the ship his hair rose abruptly and stood stiffly on end. When he stepped back it subsided.

After a while she spoke. "Lunch is out. Don't look now but your hair is standing on end."

"If it were dark I'd have a halo," Mike told her. "Honest Injun." He climbed meekly down, switched off the high voltage surface film that was playing tricks with his hair and went in to eat.

He ate hurriedly, avoiding Sally's eye, and went back to work without lingering.

The kids came home for lunch and hung around the ship chanting, "Take us for a ride, huh pop, take us for a ride."

"Go to school," he answered absently without looking up, "Go to school." They chanted into the house to tease Sally for something and left him alone. He was

working faster. The deadline grew closer, but the work was almost finished.

In late afternoon, a few minutes before deadline, it was finished. He rolled the plane to the midblock runway, and Sally helped him into his pressure suit and gave him a boost as he climbed at last into the cabin of the curiously bare and changed plane.

He waved Sally to stand clear, and she moved back calling, "Good luck Mike! Get some good—"

The jets caught and the hissing rumble drowned the rest of what she said, though he could see her lips still moving as she waved. He threw her a kiss and then concentrated on the plane as it began to roll. He needed a good smooth take off. Every drop of fuel would count.

THE long line of familiar landmarks flashed by, gaining speed, then dropped out of sight as the F-180 lifted. Houses ahead and below dwindled to toy houses, brown and green fields shrank away below him. Far below and small he saw route thirty-six, a long highway of cars crawling in a glinting, beaded chain towards the city. Farther away the city, its toy buildings sharp-etched in sunlight and late afternoon shadows, and all around him, swinging to gigantic distance, the wide curve of the blue and green clouded earth.

The naval station was to his right and below, crisscrossed runways of white concrete showing up dimly, like chalk marks on slate. The plane passed up through a thin layer of fog marking a temperature edge, and the landscape was obscured from sight.

Mike pressed the stud that fired the auxiliary rockets. There was a moment's lag, time enough to remember that they had been growing dusty in his cellar for eight years, and then the rockets coughed into action with a welcome roar, and the plane surged forward, climbing faster, ac-

celeration pressing him against the back of the seat. The air grew colder and thinner in the cabin, and he clamped the air helmet over his head and turned on the wiring of his suit. It answered with a wave of warmth.

Time passed.

The shutter of the movie camera clicked mechanically, taking a frame of Earth below every second. The normal speed playback would exaggerate his speed of climb to an incredibly swift upward rush, giving a feeling of having been taken from the moon rocket itself.

Air thinned to a curve of faint blue arched across the nearing blackness of space. Somewhere in the clouded vast curve of the planet below was the naval station where the men who were to reach the moon said their farewells and went aboard to their stations.

Mike checked his height and position again against the local radio directional signals and satisfied himself that he was on course. The great rocket ship would pass within a mile of him. It would make a good movie—the swift upward rush of the camera eye from earth, the sudden sight of the moon rocket climbing, gaining, rushing closer, looming hugely and suddenly separating into two parts, the great belt of booster rockets falling and the slim rocket remaining, darting onward and dwindling out of sight.

Carefully he set the movie camera to a whirl of normal speed, shifted the angle of the camera lens and sighted it along the way the great rocket would come. He had mounted the camera in an old universal 'gun' mount. Its automatic controls would do the rest, and the corrected radar gun-sight would swing the camera eye to follow as the ship rushed by.

The instruments were beginning to waver and the color of the sky began to shimmer slightly. This was the ionosphere, a place of charged, stripped, fast moving atoms under bombardment from the hard

radiation of space. Mike picked up an improvised switch at the end of an extension cord and turned on a generator transformer which would create—he hoped—a skin of high voltage electricity over the surface of the ship, to fend off outside electrical disturbance. It was a homemade gimmick, and he switched it on with a small prayer and a kick in the shins for himself, for he had included some extra coils on a half worked out idea of polarizing the ion flow, and he realized now that the coils could work backward and polarize or disturb the ship instead. He had chosen a poor time to experiment. It could bollix everything up.

A miniature gasoline motor began a steady *pfut pfut* behind him as it began to spin the generator wheel. Above and almost ahead, shining through the cowlings, was the half moon, growing brighter and clearer as the air thinned and the sky darkened. For a moment Mike's heart leaped, and then he made himself remember that if he were one of the crew, piloting the navy rocket to the moon, he would not aim towards the moon, but point farther east to a blank space in the sky where the moon would be in three and a half more days.

The gasoline motor *pfut-pfuttet* steadily and its heavy generator wheel spun faster, accelerating slowly upward from a hum to a shrilling whine. As he noticed it, the whine separated slowly from the background noise of the rocket jets and sounded its smooth high note as if it were right inside his helmet. The note climbed, hung for an instant at the limit of audibility in a thin note that vibrated his skull and then passed upward out of hearing range leaving his ears buzzing.

MIKE shook his head uneasily as if a bee had been flying inside his helmet and glanced at the instrument panel.

It was all wrong.

For an instant he studied it, trying to make sense and pattern out of the changed

readings. The sky seemed to have darkened suddenly. A harsh lance of sunlight struck through the canopy and splashed across the panel. He blinked, dazzled, and

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adjusted the rotation of his polaroid face plate to see clearly dials whose pointers still swung slowly at insane readings. From the corners of his eyes he noticed that some large object seemed to be approaching.

Something approaching?

Mike glanced up at jet black nothingness studded with blazing stars. Black! To one side hung a huge sunlit object. He was passing it.

It was hanging in space, white and sunlit and very jagged and beautiful, like the enlarged photograph on Mike's study wall at home.

The moon.

While Mike looked he passed the moon on the left.

AUTOMATICALLY he pushed left rudder. Rudders don't work in space. He groped and grabbed a handle that was the unused jet deflector. It was stuck. He yanked again. It wouldn't budge. Mike remembered theoretical space technique. He cut the left auxiliary.

Without any feeling of the ship turning, the vista of stars began to turn, slowly, spinning around him until the bright moon came into view again on his left—until it was almost directly before him. The sun came into sight again from below the edge of the cockpit and shone blindingly into his eyes, so that he shut them for the moment. The sun wiped a burning hand across his face. Eyes closed, Mike counterspun the double layered polaroids of the face plate to where they cross-filtered out almost all light. When it clicked into the setting he opened his eyes again. Everything was deep purple through the face plate and a deep purple moon expanded directly before him, growing tremendous. His turn seemed to have straightened out.

Mike made no estimate of his speed. That way lay insanity. He mused. If the main jet were cut, the right auxiliary could have a chance to swing the ship in a tighter curve that might miss the moon. Mike cut

the main jet. The right auxiliary was left operating alone. It chose that moment to cough and then catch on again, threateningly.

Like an expanding picture on a screen the moon exploded, coming at him with incredible speed. He was sweeping in at an angle now, passing mountains, craters, cliffs, closer and larger, a great bright plain sweeping by dizzyingly, crevices, boulders, juts of rock. He was going to crash. The ground blurred and Mike closed his eyes. One second left.

Now he'd never find out what the hell was going on.

The auxiliary coughed again and stopped. Nothing else seemed to happen. He should be dead now. Mike opened his eyes, and understood the odd sensation around his waist, he was hanging forward by his belt strap. The ship was stopped almost vertically, nose down on the moon. It didn't look especially dented. Something small was swinging in front of Mike's face, hard to identify in the deep purple light. He grabbed and captured it. It was the generator switch, swinging at the end of its extension cord. The *pfut-pfut-pfuting* still sounded in his ears.

"Drink me," Mike said. He switched it off.

The F-180 began to shift balance, and slowly, gracefully toppled onto its back and lay upside down with the canopy denting slightly.

"One-sixth gravity," said Mike, upside down, though he knew he shouldn't talk to himself.

He extricated himself, his air hose, and its gas cylinders and climbed out. He stood on rocky ground. There was a whitish film of dust over the rocks and the film rose in a slight cloud when he moved his feet and then settled, sifting down into crevices among the broken rocks. He looked up. Before him, cold lava plains rippled into distance, where, starkly black and white upthrust the cliffs of a crater.

"Moon," said Mike inside his helmet.

Outside he knew there was no sound—could be no sound. He kicked a stone. It felt heavy and solid, but it flew away in slow rising curve as if he had thrown it, and landed without sound.

"One-sixth gravity," Mike said. The sun was burning into his back through the padded suit.

He stepped back into the shadow of the F-180 and began working to take off the detachable auxiliaries. In a few moments he had them free and was using them to batter and free the fused jet deflection vanes. He didn't believe he could do the next thing, but it was easy—he heaved the plane right side up and pointed it towards a small slice of earth that showed in the western sky between two monstrous spires of moon mountains.

He tossed his air cylinders into the cabin, climbed in after them fast, and turned the switch on the extension cord before settling into the pilot's seat. Ahead was the Earth, hard to miss because of its snaring gravitational field. In the tanks, according to the gauges, were twelve minutes worth of fuel.

Ridiculous!

MIKE was late to dinner. The kids were upstairs watching television and Sally had switched on the landing lights and was washing the dishes when she heard the F-180-whistle in gently.

She had his place laid at the kitchen table when he came in and kissed her.

"Evening Mike, what's wrong with your face?"

He realized it was throbbing. "Sunburn." He thought and modified that. "Hard sunburn, radiation burn."

"I'll take care of that after you have supper. Any pictures of the rocket, Mike?"

"Not a one." He sat down and began to eat slowly, thinking.

He visualized himself reporting what had happened. Disbelief, laughter, experts dismissing his movie film as a fake, patent

engineers asking him how and why, and himself, unable to answer, standing tongue-tied and baffled before the assembled cameras of the world. Not on his life!

Mike finished dinner and went to bed with an electronics text, while Sally rubbed ointments on his throbbing skin and made soothing noises.

After work the next day he took photographs and measurements of his coils and that night went to the library and attacked the latest reports on atomic structure and field theory. His mathematics was rusty and the books were baffling at first, but he came back the next night and the next, and gradually, with the books and reports stacked around him, the rusty theoretical training began creakingly to come alive again, and a theory began to grow. Inertia had something to do with the swirl of motion within the atom. Gyroscope effect was more basic than had been known.

He was writing down ideas and tentative formulas. It was the fourth day and his face still throbbed with sunburn.

A stir, and whisper was running through the reading room of the library, in covert defiance of the silence signs. The man reading next to him leaned over and whispered:

"Radio report. The Navy rocket crashed on the moon."

Mike leaned closer. "Anything else known?"

"Four survivors. Not enough intact air tanks. Six hours to live."

There was nothing else to the report. Mike sat still for a minute, then gathered up his books, deposited them at the return window and left. In a drug store he looked up the phone number of the chief physicist on the Navy project and dialed. Someone answered.

"Yes?"

"Doctor Fishberg?"

"Yes."

"Sorry to disturb you, but it's important. Life or death. What would you say if I

told you that I have a way of reaching the moon in time to save those men?"

He was answered by the click of the connection being cut.

"That's what I thought you'd say," Mike said gently, hanging up.

He stepped out in the street again and looked up. It was nine P.M. and dark on the east coast of the North American continent of the Earth upon which he stood, but out there in space the bright glare of daylight bathed three quarters of the near side of the round moon, and in that bright daylight four men waited to be rescued, listening hopefully to the dim, wavering radio voices of Earth.

He liked those guys. . . . He should have been up there with them, or part of their team on Earth, kidding with them over the radio. That reminded him of his own team, the mechanics who worked with him in the machine shop, and of the small amount of time he had left, so he stepped back into the drug store and phoned them, Jim first, then Smokey, then Jack.

"I've got a way to save those Navy guys on the moon," he said each time. They believed him. He gave them a list of things to get for the F-180, some of them impossible to get at that hour of the night without theft, and he gave them a list of things to do. Then he called Sally and told her what he had done four days ago. She was silent a moment.

"So that's it. I was wondering when you'd tell me, Mike."

She, too, believed him.

When he got home she had the sun-filtering salve ready, and Jim, Smokey and Jack were installing a triple row of auxiliaries with great banging and grinding.

Then it was eleven-ten, and everything was ready.

Sally kissed him and put his helmet over his head. He was boosted into the plane and settled himself at the controls while the whole bunch wheeled it to the runway. He flipped the switch, the generator began

to *pfut-pfut-pfut* in his ears. The flood-lights went on, showing the long white concrete runway. Mike pressed all studs and the thunder of all the rocket jets blared out at once deafeningly. A wrenching acceleration shoved him into the back of the seat. The long line of lighted houses whipped by, dropped below in an instant. He was airborne. Mike didn't need to check any dials this time. He swung the ship, pointed it west, straight at the moon.

The transformer hum came into his helmet again the same odd sourceless sound to it, moved slowly up through the high reaches of pitch, growing thinner and thinner, and then suddenly passed beyond hearing, like a bubble blown up to ultimate tension, scattering to invisibility.

HE DIDN'T have his new technique perfect as yet. He landed a little distance away, out of sight of the wreck, and walked over, carrying his air tanks under his arm.

He walked around an upthrust of rock and stood for a while watching them. They sat in the shadow of the huge, wrecked spaceship. One was reading a comic magazine that was yellowing and curling as he turned the pages. Mike liked that. Another was using up his small store of oxygen idly chipping "Kilroy" onto a rock, and a third probably the skipper, was entering observations neatly in a log book.

They saw him.

"Hello boys," he said and walked forward. He could say anything he liked, they couldn't hear him. They had helmet radios and he didn't. "I'm glad to see you."

When he had landed at LaGuardia Field the reporters were flashing bright bulbs in his face and shouting questions. "Name? What happened? How did you do it?"

"Berganholm," he answered slowly, beginning the long session of bright lights and attention, and then the changed and new life as an engineer. "Michael Claud Berganholm."

Who was Jim Carrington that they should exert so much effort to keep him in ignorance?



ETERNAL EARTHLING

No man could cross that sinister barrier without meeting the brain that had conceived it—a solid wall, made out of time itself!

JIM CARRINGTON splashed in the waters of Hillsboro's only river, only a few feet away from the Wall, and taunted his playmates. None of them could swim, and once when he tried to push Jack Baker into the river his only response was violent fear.

By WALTER KUBILIUS

"Fraidy cats!" Jim yelled. He saw a speckled trout swim by and then dove down for it. He bruised himself on the rocks in the river and as he scrambled upward the palm of his hand struck the bottom of the Wall. *The palm of his hand struck the bottom of the Wall!* It was no more than an inch thick and if he had wanted to he could have swum right under it, and into the forbidden Outside.

"You know we're not supposed to be near the Wall," Baker said, "the radiation is liable to kill us."

"Nuts," Jim said, scrambling up the grassy bank, "If there was any radiation. . . oh, forget it." He was about to say that if there was any actual atomic radiation outside the water would be poisonous and the fish would be contaminated and deadly. Yet he had been drinking that water and eating the fish as long as he could remember. There was no poison, even though they came from the forbidden Outside. Ergo, the schoolbooks were all wrong.

He dressed quickly, picked up his textbooks and raced the boys back to Hillsboro. Pop was at the tractor wheel as usual, his farmer's eye upon that Sun which looked like a burning piece of paper plastered against the Wall. The Sun was 93,000,000 miles away, so the books said, but to Jim it still looked as if it were a part of the Wall.

"Have a good time?" Pop asked. He always asked the same question in the same way, just as Mom always had their meals ready in the same way. "Oh, it was all right," Jim said, "but I sure hope that Baker would break his neck. He gives me a pain."

He put his books in the barn and then did some of the farm chores, feeding the pigs, chickens, cows, and horses. "Pop," he asked when his father came back from the field, "why do you keep the horses since you never use them? You might as well sell them."

Pop thought for a moment. "Don't rightly know," he said, "We farmers al-

ways have horses. Do they bother you?"
"No, pop."

OLD Doc Barnes, Hillsboro's one and only practitioner, visited the farm on the following night and put Jim through another one of his rigorous examinations. He listened to Jim's heart, took samples of his blood and sweat and examined them under a portable microscope and then made notations in a large black book that had Jim's name on the front cover.

"Perfect health," Doc Barnes said as he unstrapped the pressure belt and started packing his instruments back into the three bags he brought with him. "As sound as Robinson's election program, and nothing wrong with you that fried steak and mashed potatoes can't cure."

Jim dressed. "Why do you examine me so often?" he asked.

Doc Barnes looked surprised. "Why, son, we've got socialized medicine now that Robinson's elected. It's the law, you know. Didn't you learn it in school?"

"Yes, I know," Jim said, "but why is it you never examine Pop? He's a citizen, too. Yet you only worry about me."

There was a flicker of doubt in the doctor's eyes and then the same, kind, cheerful voice. "Why, of course I do! You're simply not around when I examine your father and mother. In fact, I'm glad you reminded me so I can give them a good physical check-up. We need it every month, you know."

"Sure," Jim said. When the Doc went to Pop's bedroom an idea flashed through the boy's mind. In a sense it was spying, but the suspicion that something was wrong in Doc Barnes' bearty friendliness had long bothered Jim. It was nothing that he could identify. Was there something wrong with Jim that made the doctor so concerned with him? He spent two or three hours on Jim's monthly examination. At most he could examine five people a day, or a hun-

dred and fifty a month. A hundred and fifty a month! There were about 10,000 people in Hillsboro and Doc Barnes was the only doctor he had ever heard of.

He went quietly upstairs to the attic and pushed back a bookcase covering a wide crack in the floor. By bending down he could see through to the floor beneath and hear the conversation.

"The boy has asked why I do not examine you," Doc Barnes was saying, his voice flat and monotonous, "We will stay here for a while to satisfy him."

Then they remained sitting like stone statues in immovable chairs—Mom, Pop, and Doc Barnes.

Jim crept silently down the stairs to the porch and waited patiently until Doc Barnes left the house.

"Did you examine the folks?" Jim asked.

"I sure did," Doc Barnes said, "Gave 'em the most thorough examination I ever gave anybody. You can rest assured, son, there's not a thing wrong with them." He patted Jim on the shoulders and then went back to his car and rode in to town. Jim watched him go before going into the parlor. Doc Barnes did not stop at a single other farmhouse on the road.

"**H**ERE'S today's paper, son," Pop said, giving him the copy of the *Hillsboro Daily Chronicle*. There was no world news on this January 15, 1993, and President Robinson and Vice-President Koshbino spent the day giving tedious reports on the economic recovery program. It was the local news which hit Jim like a brick thrown into his face. Jack Baker was dead. He had fallen from a tree and broken his neck. Jim felt sick.

"Sold the horses today," Pop said, "Made a good profit on them."

"That's swell," Jim said, the words like sawdust in his mouth. His head was whirling. His eyes could no longer focus on the words of the newspaper and the

vague suspicion he had long been feeling approached one more step towards final understanding. He knew Jack Baker who never swam and, what was much more important, never climbed trees, and the knowledge that he had wished for his death made him feel like a murderer. Like some rumbling out of a whirling void, he heard his father's voice, "How are you getting on at school?"

"I hate it," Jim said, the tension in him breaking out and the accumulation of many doubts making themselves heard, "It's the other boys. I—I can't explain it. They either know too much, or not enough. I think I could learn more by myself in the library."

As soon as the anger broke, it flurried and died and soon the incident was forgotten. He did the chores around the farm and spent his free time swimming in the River at a spot where the banks widened near the Wall. He did not dive near the Wall, nor attempt to pass under it to the Outside where poisoned fumes and deadly gases scorched the ground and made one breath of air a sentence of death. Yet the water was clear and good.

A few days later Pop gave him a letter from the Board of Education for Hillsboro. It was a brief announcement declaring that because of increased tax contributions to the nation's recovery program, Hillsboro had to reduce its appropriations for education. The school was hereby closed, and those students who wished could secure adult privileges at the Public Library where Miss Wilson would be glad to confer with them.

It was the sort of privilege that Jim had long dreamed of. His hungry eyes had often feasted upon the long galleries of book shelves, all lined with thick layers of dust as if the knowledge of all the Earth had been stored here and forgotten. In their pages he would find the answers to Baker's death, the dishonesty of Doc Barnes, and perhaps even the mystery of

the Wall and what was really outside.

Miss Wilson, head librarian for the adult division, was a thin, white-faced woman with the same kind of blank smile that Doc Barnes wore. She perched on a high stool beside her desk at the entrance. "What would you like to read?" she asked. "I have here a very good book on natural history which you might like, or would you prefer some adult fiction? Here is a splendid—"

"If it's all right, I'd like to just look around for myself."

"—novel about farm life and how a young man developed a process that doubled his agricultural yield."

"May I go in?" Jim asked, exasperated by the long lecture which droned from Miss Wilson's lips. She stopped suddenly, looked blankly at him as if listening to someone, and then smiled.

"Of course. You can take out any books that you like. Do you know how to use the catalogue?"

"Yes, yes." Jim said, hurriedly moving into the deserted library. The long rows of book stacks stretched almost endlessly through the huge vaulted chamber. Jim's nose twitched at the pleasant musty odor of age that clung about the cloth and leather-bound volumes. He studied some of the titles, pulled the books from the shelves and with a gusty breath blew off the layer of dust upon the fore-edge and flicked through the pages. The books of fiction, which occupied more than half the shelves, did not interest him. He wandered through the sections on science and particularly through the 900's where the history books were. Unlike the fiction books that were practically untouched, there were huge empty spaces in the shelves, bright exposed metal gleaming where numbers of books had been suddenly removed.

On some of the books there were curious scratches upon the dusty covers, as if oddly shaped hands had picked them up

and then decided to put them back upon the shelves.

"Perhaps," Jim said, "the books about the Wall are classified separately."

He went to the rows of catalogue drawers in the center of the library and pulled out the one labelled Wa-Wun. There were no books on the subject of the Wall or any little carrying information about it. There were several that carried the word "Outside" in them, but none of the books dealt with what Hillsboro meant when "Outside" was mentioned. He thought there might be some other term for "Wall" that he had not heard, and he began to look through the listings of "Screen," "Ceiling," "Barrier," "Barricade," and everything he could think of or find in the dictionaries. The catalogue seemed to be thorough, even though quite a number of the index cards had been ripped out, as he could tell by the scraps of paper remaining, but there was nothing about the Wall in any of them.

Dismayed, he tried to be satisfied with a few history books and brought them to Miss Wilson for recording.

She glanced at the titles, smiled brightly, and stamped the due dates on his card. "Find everything you want?" she asked.

"No," he said, somewhat angry as he slipped the books under his arm. "I couldn't find anything about the Wall."

Her smile faded. "The Wall?"

"Yes," he exclaimed, irritated at what was clearly some sort of effort to hide the truth from him. "The Wall, Ceiling, Dome, whatever you want to call it, that's all around Hillsboro. Why doesn't anyone ever mention it? I wouldn't have even known it was there if I didn't go swimming near it. There's not a single book about it in the whole library."

Miss Wilson regained her composure. "Of course there is," she said very sweetly as if talking to an unreasonable child. "Have you tried the catalogue?"

"Yes, and there's no card for it."

"You must be mistaken," she said. "I'll help you look for it when you return next week."

"Sure," Jim said, certain that some sort of excuse would be found. He sensed the existence of a strange conspiracy. What was there to hide?

"POP," he asked after the evening chores were done and they were seated on the porch, listening to the crickets and watching the clouds roll by the face of the moon, "Just what is the Wall?"

Pop put down his paper and looked speculatively off toward the horizon where the translucent Wall dug into the earth just beyond that line of hills. "It's been there long before you was born," he said, "Sort of a defense against the Outside, if I remember rightly."

"What's Outside?" Jim asked quietly.

Pop picked up his paper and started reading to show that he didn't feel like talking much. "Heck, everybody knows that Poison gas and gamma radiations and stuff like that. It'd kill everybody if it got in."

Jim thought of the clean fresh water and the healthy fish that flowed from under the Wall. He wanted to ask Pop but the newspaper was now a barrier between them.

There was not enough light to read by so Jim looked out across the fields and up to the inverted Dome through which the stars could be seen. There seemed to be peace and contentment outside and not the death and horror his father hinted at. When Pop left the porch Jim took his place under the lamp and read through the history books. Most of them were very old, dating back to 1970. Since there was no mention of the Wall in them or the atomic wars which made the Wall necessary, Jim concluded that the Wall was built between 1970 and '75, when he was born.

Jim picked up the next book, "History of the United Nations," published in 1992. It was only one year old yet had the strange appearance of great age, the pages stained and crinkly. He looked closely at the title page and read the small print that made his heart pound. "Ninth edition," the tiny letters said, "Revised and corrected by the author, January 2039."

It's a misprint, Jim reasoned, *for this is only 1993.* Nevertheless he turned hastily towards the back pages and began reading:

F. T. Robinson, during whose presidential administration the United Nations secured a lasting peace, died in a rocket crash in 2001. Koshbano served as president until the expiration of his term in 2002, and the election of Ghafa Benjamin occurred the following year.

During Ghafa's administration the Planet Commission continued its efforts to build a successful extra-galactic vessel but these were without success until 2038.

The gradual elimination of farming communities, begun during Robinson's term as president, continued under the new administration. The artificial manufacture of food by reprocessing industrial waste had revolutionized social customs, particularly in the frequent distressing economic dislocations—

Jim Carrington put the book aside, bewildered by the massive history of great events which were yet to occur. President Robinson was alive, for he had seen his calm, dignified face on the television screen many times. As for the artificial manufacture of food supposedly convulsing the nation's economy, there was not the slightest evidence of it in Hillsboro. Pop plowed the field with his tractor and the wheat, oats, and rye were delivered to town where they were stored in warehouses, presumably for shipment to other Wall-surrounded cities. If food could be manufactured, there was no point in growing it here. If it could not be manufactured then the history book was some sort of fraud.

He hurriedly skimmed through the pages searching for some reasonable explanation. The more he read, the more confused he

became. There was no mention of any world-wide atomic conflagration in 1970 and not the slightest indication anywhere that Wall-enclosed cities existed or were ever considered.

There were creaking sounds in the driveway and Jim looked up to see Doc Barnes' battered car come to a stop. The medic waved to him, and then came puffing up the porch steps. "Evenin', Jim," he said, "Thought I'd drop by and say hello."

"Pop and Mom are in the parlor if you want to see them."

Doc Barnes eased himself with a grunt in the porch rocking chair and wiped his sweating forehead with a rumpled handkerchief. "Nothing important," he said, "just returning from a call and thought I'd drop by and rest a while." He glanced around him and saw the books on the floor beside Jim. "Been reading a lot, son?"

"Yes," Jim said cautiously, "a couple of history books."

"Never could see anything interesting in history," Doc Barnes said, "I always felt the physical sciences had more challenge in them. There's nothing more thrilling than examining a bug under a microscope. Come down to my lab sometime and I'll show you some fascinating aspects of scientific research."

DOC BARNES talked on and the guarded suspicion which Jim felt gradually faded away. He scarcely understood half the words the doctor used in explaining the anatomy of atoms and how molecular velocities could be measured.

"History has no meaning," Doc Barnes said, "and you'll never find truth there. Study the sciences where all evidence can be weighed and measured. It's the only road to truth."

"What is the Wall?" Jim asked suddenly.

"Crushed matter," Doc Barnes said unhesitatingly, "It's a mixture of bare nuclei

and free, unattached electrons. Ordinarily such an electronic gas would expand and dissipate but for layers of transparent matter which keep it within set confines. The wall is then completely impenetrable to everything but harmless sun and starlight, and yet it can be touched without danger. It was built in 1975, during the planet-wide war which rendered so much land radioactively dangerous."

"If that's true," Jim said, knowing that the moment of decision had come, "why is it there's no mention of the Wall or even the war in this history book?"

He opened the book triumphantly and passed it over to the Doctor. He did not know the elements of the conspiracy, but he was sure that Doc Barnes was part of it. The Wall was an important element of their lives yet there was never any mention of it in the Library which was supposed to hold the sum of human knowledge. Doc Barnes' face was set and hard as he read the pages that Jim opened before him. He flipped the leaves, glancing at the years marked at the head of each page—1970—1980—1990—1995—2000—2035. It was not only a history of the past, it was a history of the future as well, and nowhere was there any mention of the Wall.

"What year is this?" Jim demanded. Here at last was his chance to grope with the mystery of his life. Who was he? What was he? As a boy he remembered nothing but Pop and Mom in the Hillsboro farm but as he grew older he began to realize certain inconsistencies. His slightest wishes seemed to become automatic law. He recalled how Doc Barnes seemed to live only to look after Jim, and how the whole town of Hillsboro was joined in a conspiracy to keep him in ignorance of certain things. Perhaps he was imagining these things—but they had become too frequent. This book was the first proof he had found for his suspicions. It clearly proved that no only was there no Atomic War and no

need for a Wall, but that even the date was a lie.

"What year is this?" he demanded again.

"1993, of course," Doc Barnes said, uneasily.

"Then what is this book?" Jim asked, almost violently. "Is it possible to foretell the future?"

"Of course not," Doc Barnes said, "the future is closed to us. As for this book, I'm sorry that it disturbed you for it is obviously a hoax. It was probably published as some sort of college thesis in speculative history. That is frequently done in some of the universities, the idea being to test the applicant and see whether he has mastered the various theories of social history. Economic and anthropologic factors as determinants in history are considered quite valid in some colleges. Incidentally, Jim, would you like to go to college a year or so from now? I have some friends at Harvard and they might accept you."

Jim tore the book from Doc Barnes' hands. "You're not telling me the truth!" he said hotly. "This is no Ph. D. thesis or even any attempt at hoaxing somebody. It's a textbook, pure and simple, only it's a textbook from the future that does not mention any Atomic War or any Wall around Hillsboro or any other place. Why isn't the Wall mentioned anywhere else? I've looked through all the history books in the library and nowhere is the Wall even hinted at. Why?"

"Oh come now," Doc Barnes said, reaching into his medical kit and fumbling for some instrument. "I'm sure you're mistaken. When you visit the library again, ask one of the attendants to help you."

Jim watched Doc Barnes' hand come out of the black bag. Between fore and index fingers was the transparent body of a hypodermic, with thumb securely placed against the plunger.

"What are you going to do?" Jim asked, becoming afraid.

"Nothing important," Doc Barnes said,

"These are some vitamins. They will help improve your appetite."

"My appetite is all right," Jim said, slowly standing up and stepping back to the porch wall. Doc Barnes also arose and stepped near him.

"Don't be afraid," Doc Barnes said, "This won't hurt at all."

Jim ducked beneath the upraised arm, kicking aside the books that littered the porch. He was not fast enough and Doc's arm plunged down and the needle jabbed into his shoulder. "Pop! Mom!" he screamed, and then tumbled into darkness.

IN THE morning Jim arose and had breakfast with Pop, wondering if the events of last night were only a dream. "Doc Barnes was here last night," he said to his father.

"Yeah?" Pop said, "I didn't hear him."

"We had a long talk," Jim said doubtfully, "I—I think I fainted."

"Maybe you been reading too much," Pop said, "You looked all right when I saw you go to bed."

Jim finished the rest of his meal in silence. On the porch he picked up four library books, the fifth being missing, and returned them to the Library.

Instead of Miss Wilson there was a young, round-faced man in steel gray suit at the recording desk. He took Jim's books and stamped his library card.

"She's no longer here," he said in answer to Jim's question, "The Board transferred her to another library. Inefficient, I understand, for many of the books were misplaced on the shelves and entered incorrectly in the catalogue."

Jim took his card and looked on the "due" list. "I still have one book home," he said.

The librarian shook his head. "You must be mistaken. You've returned all the books listed on your card. What is the title?"

"History of the United Nations."

The librarian studied a list before him.

"I'm sorry, but there's no such book listed. Do you know when it was published?"

Jim bit his lip. "2038."

The librarian smiled, "You are joking, of course."

Knowing further talk would be useless, Jim went into the library. That book would never be found, he knew, for Doc Barnes had taken it. The "vitamin" injection was only a sedative to enable the doctor to steal the book and make Jim think the whole incident a dream. The new librarian was also part of the conspiracy around him, just as Miss Wilson had been. He had learned one thing in his talk with Doc Barnes, and that was not to trust anyone. For all he knew every man and woman in Hillsboro, not excepting his own father and mother, was part of that mysterious alliance to keep him from learning the truth—whatever that truth might be.

He went to the catalogue drawers, determined to make one final search for some book that might have a passing reference to the Wall or the Atomic War that necessitated its construction. The chance remark of the new librarian that Miss Wilson was inefficient had prepared him for the shock. One-third of the Wa-Wun catalogue drawer was filled with index cards listing various books about the Wall.

He went to the shelves in the History Department and the formerly empty spaces were now filled with brightly bound new books printed on clean, glossy paper. Their title pages were all stamped, "Copyright, 1993."

There was no dust on any of them. Before he opened any of the pages he knew these books would contain only the sort of information "they" wanted him to believe. He read:

In 1970, after the outbreak of the disastrous inter-continental Atomic War which depopulated the world, construction of Wall-enclosed cities began. Thanks to the Wall, which is impervious to atomic attack or radiation, civilization has been permitted to survive. Today, in 1993, only a handful of

Wall-enclosed cities remain to carry on man's struggle for self-preservation on a planet continually swept by atomic storms whose deadly fumes are held back only by the Wall—

Jim thought of the clean, fresh water that flowed from under the Wall, and put the book back on the shelf. Only the first book had told the truth. There had been no Atomic War and the Wall was not designed to keep poison fumes out, but to keep him in Hillsboro.

Why? There was no one that Jim could ask, for everyone was part of that indefinable, mysterious group which he could only call *they*. What was their purpose? Who was Jim Carrington that they should exert so much effort to keep him in ignorance? He thought he had enough evidence in the history book with which to confront them and demand an explanation, but Doc Barnes had taken it away from him. Very well, then, he would find additional proof and when he confronted them with their lies, they would be forced to tell the truth.

THAT evening Doc Barnes came again to visit him. "Just though I'd pass by," the doctor said as he sat down upon the porch rocking chair "Haven't see you for some time. Been feeling all right?"

Jim nodded. "Funny thing," he said "I had a queer dream about you last night."

Doc Barnes fanned himself. "Dreams have very little significance. I would just forget about it."

"Doc," Jim said slowly, "if I asked you an important question, would you give me an honest answer? You know that last night was no dream, and I know it. Would you answer just one question honestly?"

The doctor kept on fanning himself as he looked out across the field to where the stars could be seen through the invisible Wall.

"What's your question, Jim?" he asked not turning to look into Jim's eyes.

"Tell me," Jim said, "am I—am I different from everybody else?"

The aurora borealis could be seen, its brilliant colors like some curtain hanging over Hillsboro. Both Doctor and boy stared at it.

"Why do you ask?"

"'Cause I feel it."

Doc Barnes considered this and asked, with a strange note of regret in his voice, "You're not happy here?"

Jim shook his head, not daring to speak.

"Then what do you want?"

Jim pointed to the aurora whose vivid colors seemed to be draped somewhere halfway between the horizon and the dome of the never seen but always-sensed Wall.

"I want to go Outside," Jim said, knowing now what it was that had rankled within him for so many years. "I want to see what is on the other side of the Wall."

There was a sad expression on Doc Barnes face, as if he knew what was there but could not voice his knowledge. It was not a thing that inspired fear or horror—as a world wracked with atomic poisons might—but something which was sad and lonely.

"I'm sorry," Doc Barnes said. There was nothing more to add, for in the doctor's inflection Jim could hear the refusal which *they* gave to his request for permission to leave Hillsboro.

"All right," Jim said, pretending to resign himself to the doctor's unwillingness to tell him the nature of the truth. He knew that if he were ever to learn the reason for the secrecy and deception he would find it only Outside—on the other side of the Wall.

When Doc Barnes had left and Jim was in bed, the plan slowly formed in his mind. The Carrington house was located on the outskirts of Hillsboro, only a few miles from the Wall itself. The aurora had died and there was no moon that night. He could reach the Wall within a few hours.

Jim crawled out of bed and dressed

quickly and then climbed out of his window to step gingerly upon the porch. He jumped to the soft ground and then headed for the river. Despite the darkness he walked rapidly and after three hours reached the point where the river flowed from underneath the Wall.

Jim stood on the brink for a moment, calculating the risks he took, and then plunged downward. He held his breath as he slid down against the glass-like substance of the Wall, his fingers clutching for the edge. He found it, gripped tight and pulled himself through against the rapid river current. Something slapped in his face, he kicked at the vague shadow in horror and then remembered that it might be a fish. His lungs now starved for precious air, he started to rise. If Doc Barnes and the history books were correct, he would die with the first breath when he reached the surface, and eventually they would find his corrupted body in the bed of the stream.

He kept on rising, and when his head broke the surface his lungs breathed in fresh, cool air. Pantingly he rested against the Wall, fighting the down-current that threatened to pull him back into Hillsboro. In the pitch darkness he could see nothing. After catching breath he pushed himself away from the Wall and swam towards where the river bank might be. His tired hands clutched at the shore and he dragged himself upward and then rested upon the grassy bank.

While he lay there, breathing and waiting for the pounding of his heart to subside, he knew that the first step in his effort to find out the truth was successful. The Outside was not deadly. The air was fresh and clean, and nowhere around him could he see the atomic volcanoes that were said to throw their deadly missiles against the Wall. He had no equipment to measure radiation, but if there were no deadly fumes and he was still alive, he had a right to assume that the whole story was fictitious.

and there was no deadly radlation whatever.

It was too dark for Jim to see any part of the horizon. A glimmer of moonlight shot through the clouds and for a moment Jim thought he saw a series of immense domes in the distance. The moon hid once more and again he was in total darkness. Placing his fingertips upon the wall he cautiously walked forward and found himself upon some curving embankment that curled upward around the Wall. In place of steps there were a series of deep indentations which made it difficult for him to secure good footing. He found at eye level against the Wall a rail which served as a sort of guide. Using this he drew himself along.

WHEN the moon broke through again he was astonished to see the entire town of Hillsboro stretched before him as a sort of huge diorama. He could see clearly every single house and street and the familiar woodlands where he had played as a boy.

The road on which Jim walked rose higher, still hugging the Wall and he knew that while he could see through the Wall into Hillsboro, vision was possible only in this one direction. He had often stared through this same section of Wall and seen only a vague haze which everyone assured him was only mist or fog.

Hillsboro, from the height where he stood, did not look like New York or Moscow, or any of the other really big cities of the Earth which he had seen pictured in some of the older history books. Rather it had a bit of all of them, and he now understood who he was and why he was so important.

The truth became evident when he reached up about one fourth of the height of the ramp, and touched the first of three small projections beneath the rail.

As he did so a clear, sharp thought formed itself in his mind.

Species: Man.

He looked about him, thinking someone had spoken. He touched the first lever again. Once more the thought rang in his mind.

Species: Man.

This was some sort of telepathic communication, he realized, and then touched the second lever.

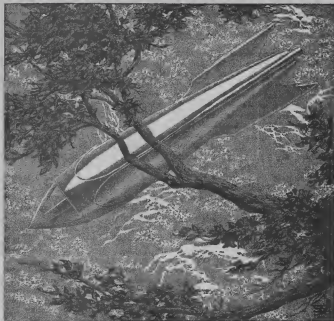
Habitat: Third Planet, Sun. Farm area in temperate zone of northern hemisphere Third lever.

Special note: A remarkable feature of this unique exhibit is the actual presence of a living, warm-blooded, oxygen-breathing Man among the Robot-Duplicate models. For many centuries the Museum had attempted to maintain living colonies but all experiments had failed. As the Third Planet became settled by colonists from . . . , Man specimens became increasingly difficult to obtain. It is believed that Jim Carrington, as the Man Specimen contained in this exhibit is named, is the last of his species, his small tribe having annihilated itself rather than submit to taming by . . . scientists. Jim Carrington was brought to . . . and this model constructed by the Museum directors. It is complete with Robot-Duplicate Models of all known types of Man Specimens. The extraordinary skill with which the exhibit was prepared is attested to by the fact that even at this moment the last living Man Specimen, Jim Carrington, is not aware of the true situation. The model you see is a typical Earth community as it existed two hundred years ago.

Jim Carrington knew who he was at last. There was a slithering motion on the ramp and he turned to face the Keeper of the Natural Habitat Zoo.

Before he saw the alien, a last furtive thought-message thrust itself upon his mind:

Caution! Do not feed or harbor escaped specimens. Deliver them immediately to the dissection chambers.



Down we swooped between towering walls of foliage. . . .

THE UNFINISHED

Star-roving conqueror of the universe—and slave of the little green hell wrested from a galaxy that cursed his birth . . . they battled to death over one little question: Who is Man?

By FRANK BELKNAP
LONG

THIS was the time we were exploring for the Larkin Museum, half across the Milky Way. We had rocket tube trouble, and had to land for repairs on a little green world a thousand light years from home.

"We'll have to bring her down, son!" the old one said, glancing up sharply from the navigation dial. "Too bad, but there's no help for it!"

I gave a booming laugh of disgust, thinking of the steamy jungles which were pretty much the rule on the inner planets of Class G Stars. Tall, gloomy old

forests filled with rotting vegetation and vast swarms of stinging, blood-sucking insects.

The old one was secretly happy about it. He liked to tramp the wild and feel the wind and rain on his face. Slowly as I stared at him he took on the unmistakable glow of a lad whose idea of paradise was to sit on a sun-dappled bank in the russet autumn, watching bait drift downstream and a beauty rising to his lure.

He liked to explore, but was satisfied just to fish and hunt. He could take root anywhere, like a hungry mass of leaven cheated of its birthright. He was happy enough in space, but he could never quite reconcile himself to the absence of growing things in the bridge room of a rocket ship.

"It's been ages since I've lain on my back in a spruce forest, staring straight up at the stars."

He grinned, a fleck of chew staining his jagged teeth. "Ages—and I'll trade you all the shining metal of the finest rocket ship ever built for one sniff of the good sweet earth. It's the same everywhere, on all the planets. The sea and the jungle!"

"Sure, sure," I said, to pacify him and keep him from bursting into song. "Paradise in the palm of your hand. Now if you'll just brace yourself and grab hold of that safety rail I'll try to bring her down without shaking you loose from your pipe dreams!"

It was a smooth landing as landings go. Down we swooped between towering walls of foliage, golden yellow and burning emerald green, the viewscreen at my elbow coruscating in a dazzling burst of sunlight.

My hands were steady on the controls, but for a moment I felt like a badly scared giant killer swinging down from a beanstalk that would have spanned the gulfs between the stars. I really did. Star rovers are linked to the world of child-

hood in a great variety of ways, for they see the same strange hues everywhere they turn.

The light that never was shines only for them, and even an old man married fifty years could put his arm around his wife and say, "Tomorrow I'll be in deep space, and your eyes will be as pretty as misty moons swimming in a sea of gold."

He could mean every word of it, too, because in space time seems to fall away, and your memories become the memories of youth, and you see everything as if for the first time through absolutely unspoiled eyes.

I shook the feeling off with a gesture. "You can let go now!" I said. "We're resting at a tangent, but we couldn't be more firmly grounded if we were pushing up daisies."

He unhooked his arm from the rail and swabbed a perspiring brow. "You're a good pilot, son!" he said. "They don't come any steadier."

I looked at him. "Well—we'd better go outside and check on the damage." I spoke gruffly, nodding toward the vacuum port. "We won't need our oxygen masks. The atmosphere reading is a bit high, but we can take that in our stride."

I was not unmindful of his compliment, but it confused and embarrassed me to have him turn the searchlight on my competence. Sure I was a good pilot. Hadn't I crossed the galaxy twenty times, without losing a ship? I was as proud of my record as the next man, but I saw no reason for shoulder thumping.

A man needs all his self-esteem in space, but it should be accepted as something to be put on like a shining garment and worn in silence.

"Well, let's get going!" I said.

We emerged from the vacuum port completely unarmed, carrying only a few necessary tools and expecting to be greeted by a howling wind in an empty forest clearing.

WE WERE greeted by a howling, all right. But it came from a familiar throat, and the wind that swept strong across the clearing made a moaning sound which was almost as painful to listen to.

The man was down on his knees on the forest floor, howling in either rage or pain. There was a great red gash in his shoulder, and he was rolling his eyes about and slapping at the wound with his palms.

I don't scare easily, but the sight was so unexpected that it jolted me back on my heels.

I can't speak for the old one. He seemed calm enough as he stood staring at my side, a look of serene wonder in his eyes. Serene wonder! Yes, that just about sums it up. There was an eternal child-like quality about him I've never seen equaled in man or intelligent beast.

Nothing under the wheeling stars could really scare him, for he'd mastered the knack of accepting nature in all of her moods, the worst along with the best. Even atrocious pain and death he could accept as the dark side of a very bright and wonderful coin.

The wounded man was plainly a savage. He wore no clothes, and there was a metal bracelet on his right ankle which jangled as he thrashed. He was tall and sturdily built, a powerful brute of an aborigine with a look of native intelligence about him which boded ill for his enemies.

"Stay where you are, son! I'll be right back!"

The old one ducked quickly back into the vacuum port, leaving me alone with the brute. I looked down at the heavy magnetic wrench in my hand, my mouth as dry as death. I had a vision of myself under savage attack, bringing the blunt weapon down on the skull of one of my fellows.

The vision sickened me. The poor devil was half-maddened by pain, and in my

book a savage had a moral right to strike out blindly at anything that menaced his security. In his book I was a hostile stranger from the sky.

Why, I'd be a kind of murderer, even if he attacked me! Oh, sure, I'm thin-skinned and proud of it. The Larkin Museum didn't expect me to be a colonizing brute. All they wanted were records, archaeological, anthropological, semantic, for the greater glory of science.

When I was a kid, knee-high to a grasshopper, my dad used to say that a soldier of science takes twenty steps back down the ladder when he sheds blood, and I've never gotten over being the son of my father.

"Has he spoken at all?" The old one asked, popping out of the port with the incredible eagerness of a yearling colt, a semantic recorder and a long roll of translating tape under his arm.

He started threading the tape into the recorder without waiting for my reply, his face mirroring about seventeen levels of delight.

"We'll get him to talk! He'll say something and then we'll play the tape back!"

The old one isn't often wrong. But he was for once. Apparently the wounded aborigine just didn't want his thoughts translated by a mechanical metal box into the speech of the strangers from the sky.

He stood up and glared at us for a second or two, his eyes smoldering with emotions as old as man.

Sure, boy, I thought. We've caught you at a bad moment, with your hair down. You have your pride.

I must have guessed what he was thinking, for he suddenly drew himself up as though in fierce pride, and stood at his full height, the wound gleaming in his flesh like some great crimson medal won for valor beyond the call of duty on a battlefield the jungle could never claim.

The man-spirit can be a pretty fine and plucky thing when it doesn't try to con-

ceal the grievousness of its wounds, and I admired that savage for all the things we had in common—and the milestones we still must pass.

"He'll say something now!" The old one whispered, with a swift intake of his breath. "He's going to speak!"

I never saw man or beast turn quite as fast as that savage. One minute he was facing us in the sunlight, as still as a sub-critical mass getting set for an atomic explosion. The next he was plunging furiously away from us through the underbrush, a cloud of buzzing insects in his wake.

The old one had a shining gift for understatement when frustration gnawed at him.

"Well, now—" was all he said.

The magnificent savage was gone, and we were alone again, in a clearing so still you could have heard a goat pululating. But I didn't let it throw me. Getting the ship repaired came first—was the big, important job, anyway.

I took the old one by the arm and hurried him toward the stern rocket tubes.

"We've got to work fast!" I warned. "If he comes back with his tribe they'll take it for granted that we wounded him."

"Why do savages shift guilt around that way?" The old one complained. "Seems like most savages simply work off their rage on the first stranger they meet, innocent or guilty."

"It works for a rough kind of justice in the long run," I assured him. "At some time in their lives most of us *are* guilty. If they become careless too they deserve what they get."

The damage wasn't too bad.

"It's an hour's job if we work our heads off!" I said. "Maybe I'm an alarmist, but I think we should try to whittle that estimate down a bit."

"Just as you say, son!" The old one grinned, stripping off his weather jacket.

That was the best thing about him. He

could talk himself into a blue funk, but when a job looked really tough he became as solid and laconic as a square of granite.

WE FINISHED the repair job in exactly twenty-eight minutes, and were heading back toward the vacuum port when the old one grabbed my arm.

"Look!"

The alien beasts were standing at the edge of the clearing in a blaze of reddening sunlight. They had emerged from the underbrush in utter silence, appearing so suddenly out of the shadows it seemed almost like a conjuring trick.

In all my experience I had never seen creatures so repulsive. For the first time in my life that I could remember I was afraid, but I just couldn't fit them into any sane pattern of fear, couldn't explain exactly why they made my blood run cold.

The creatures walked upright and were vaguely lizardlike, but with a raw-skinned aspect of face and limb that made me repudiate the idea that they could be true reptiles. Embryonic! It's tricky, but there's a certain flabby pinkness, a *blubbermouth* kind of pinkness which suggests the unformed, the monstrous.

The creatures must have possessed a fair degree of intelligence, for they wore fantastic garments and carried metal weapons. But the embryonic impression wouldn't down. You know the shiver you get when you see something soft and pink and mottled with tadpole arms breaking water, making blubbery noises at the edge of a stagnant pool. These creatures were on dry land, were almost as large as we. But the blubbermouth feeling stayed with me.

There were just two of the beasts and they seemed to be discussing us. They made harsh, revolting noises which sounded to the old one like intelligent speech. In ten seconds flat he'd forgotten

his surprise and disgust and was busy with the semantic recorder, his eyes shining as he edged toward them across the clearing.

I moved forward to warn him, but he was deaf to all caution. He waved me back, his eyes hard with high, scientific purpose. The clearing seemed suddenly bleak and lonely. We were alone with strange beasts, with dangerous beasts, a thousand light years from green lawns and the laughter of children, from smoky fireplaces, book-lined studies and the bright rite of friendship.

One segment of my mind was alert to our danger, but the other was back in a little country town, and I was walking arm in arm with the prettiest miss ever to wed a star-roving explorer and live to rue the day.

The old one was twenty feet from the nearest of the beasts when their metal weapons roared. It was a brutal attack, as unexpected as it was senseless. He hadn't made a single menacing gesture. He had simply advanced across the clearing clasp- ing an instrument of science, his clear blue eyes wide with the innocence of his breed.

In sick horror I saw him stagger back, and sink to his knees. For an instant stark incredulity looked out of his eyes. Then he swayed and cried out to me.

"Don't let 'em fire again! Watch out—"

I can get mad fast.

I went after the beasts in blind fury, not caring a hoot if I caught a weapon blast full in the face. I'd have crushed under foot a poisonous snake that struck without warning, and I had less compunction about doing the same to creatures intelligent enough to forge metal weapons.

When they saw me charging at them they dropped their weapons and went plunging into the forest. I kept right on after them, ignoring the interlacing tendrils and prickly vines which lashed and tore at my flesh.

I overtook one of them a hundred feet from the clearing. I had a curious feeling of excitement as I closed in on it my arms spread wide. Would it attempt to fight back? The eyes that bored into mine were unmistakably intelligent. Surely it knew fear, for it was trembling convulsively, and it kept backing away from me as if it could not accept the reality of my nearness, and the fact that it had no chance at all.

Behind it the vegetation was so densely corded that a beast twice its girth could not have broken through. It was still recoiling when my arms went about it, and I crushed it to me in a tight, unyielding embrace.

Had it a spine that I could crack, lungs which would collapse in a frothy bubbling? I was sure of nothing. I only knew that I was about to crush the life from a creature whose flesh was cold, soggy, like the flesh of a scavenger bird. Just being so close to it made me physically sick.

As its repulsive cries whispered into silence it bobbed its head about and I could have sworn it hissed at me. But I may have been mistaken about that.

Suddenly all my anger left me.

What's the use, I thought. Let it crawl away into its lair, let it live out its hateful life in the deep jungle, as scorpions did, or lizards with green and vermillion poison pouches protruding from their throats.

Trouble was, such lizards were beautiful to look at. This creature was as ugly as an eyeless slug. The fact that it had eyes and wore clothes, and possessed intelligence of a sort didn't make it one whit less ugly.

I felt disgusted. Hating an animal because nature had made it the way it was was just as stupid as hating a worm-gnawn apple or a leech-covered stone at the edge of a pond.

I opened my arms wide and let the loathsome beast slip to the ground.

Beasts who developed intelligence without shedding their jungle instincts had a long and unpleasant history behind them. I'd encountered such beasts before, on more worlds than I cared to remember, but never in such an evolved stage of culture. I thought of the rock-splitting birds of Spagoon, with their rude flint weapons and elaborate burial customs, and the fire lizards of Galmar, not so named because they could pass through fire like salamanders, but because they had actually mastered the use of fire, and knew how to forge iron arrowheads.

Beasts scaly, leathery, warm-blooded, a few within the weight range of man.

This creature was well within the weight range of man, but I was pretty sure it had a life span as brief as the skunk weeds of our suburban gardens, which bloom in the late autumn and die at the first touch of frost. That would mean it could never learn very much. Natural selection would eventually finish what I'd started out to do.

"You can thank Dame Nature for your good luck, Mr. Scorpion Eyes," I said.

The beast seemed to know that it had been granted a reprieve, for it started to whimper again, and suddenly it was dragging itself away from me over the forest floor.

Fighting down my revulsion, I swung about and went striding back to the clearing.

"YOU'VE got to let me play the record through, son!" The old one said, hours later. "I tell you, I feel all right now. I'm okay. It was just a flesh wound. What if I did lose a little blood?"

We were almost in deep space, a good five billion miles from the Class G Star sun which warned a worm-riddled little green butternut of a world I hoped never to see again. Worm-riddled because those creatures were on it.

I thought of the savage, standing straight and proud in the sunlight, claiming his birthright despite his pain. A great, throbbing wound in his side and yet he could still draw himself up and defy us.

Well—some day that little green butternut of a world would belong to a magnificent savage with a civilizing gleam in his eyes. And he wouldn't be wearing a primitive chain bracelet on his ankle then. He'd be on his way to the stars!

So the old one wanted to play the recording through, did he? He'd failed to get a semantic recording of the magnificent savage's speech. All he had was worm speech from the throat of creatures who had tried to kill him.

Why did he wish to inflict further torment on himself?

I had no moral right to oppose him. He was an able scientist and he had the fine, childlike curiosity of his breed, and if he felt strong enough to listen to a recording of first-rate scientific importance I had no call to put my oar in.

"Go ahead!" I grunted. "Who's stopping you?"

He seemed a little apologetic as he turned the recorder on. "Uh—you made a fine job of bandaging up my arm, son," he said. "Don't think I'm not grateful for what you did."

"Go ahead, play it!" I said. "If it will give you any fun play it twenty times. Get up and dance to it."

"Don't forget—they were intelligent beasts. Their speech *will* translate. We'll get something more than the gibberish we heard."

"Sure we will," I said. "A long string of obscenities, most likely."

He gripped my arm. "Listen!"

"Eddy, Eddy—" a voice spoke out of the recorder. "Eddy—Oh, no!"

"Hey, don't start thinking things. I see them too, and I'm not excited."

"But they're wearing clothes, Eddy!"

"Sure they are. Carny clothes! What the dickens! Can't you see it's some dumb bally talker's idea of a joke?"

"But-but we haven't got three bears, Eddy! Just the bear that broke away. Just Mike Bruin who turned ugly on us!"

"They're from some other circus then!"

"That won't wash, Eddy. There ain't another circus within a hundred miles of here. Nobody could have dressed up bears like that anyway. They're not wearing carny duds—naw! Just funny looking jumper suits!"

"Now take it easy, will you! Don't get thinking things—"

"Who would want to get two more bears and play a joke like that on us? Be sensible, Eddy!"

"Well—"

"How would anybody know Mike Bruin would break his chain and we'd have to go hunting him with shotguns?"

"I'll bet you twenty bucks—"

"Now look, Eddy! We go after an escaped bear on a rampage. Otherwise, he'll kill somebody and the circus will get blamed. All right. We take a pot shot at him, lose sight of him and run smack into . . . what? Two polar bears. And be-

hind them is a twenty-ton cigar wrapped up in silver foil, and they're dressed up for a fancy costume ball or something."

"If you're going to start imagining things—"

"A twenty-ton silver cigar. An all-metal cigar, and the end of it looks exactly like the end of a double-barreled shotgun when you break it open. Only there are more rocket tubes than that!"

"Rocket tubes? Now I know you're ticky in the coco!"

"If that's not a spaceship—"

"Yeah, but they wouldn't be bears!"

"How do you know what Martians would look like? Did you ever see a Martian?"

"But bears—"

"Look at it this way. Maybe there are no real bears on Mars, or wherever they come from. If that was so they wouldn't picture themselves as bears. They'd picture themselves as men. I mean—they wouldn't look like bears to themselves."

"Uh! Then how would they picture us?"

"That's what I'm worried about. How would we look to a bear? How would

(Continued on page 111)



They played for keeps in . . .

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He plunged downward,
toward the light. . . .

CHILD Of The GREEN LIGHT

By LEIGH BRACKETT

SON felt the distant, ringing shiver of the metal under him. The whole close-packed mass of broken hulks shifted slightly with the impact, turning wheel-like around the shining Light.

Son half rose. He'd been sprawled full length on the crest of the wheel, trying to make the Veil get thin enough to see through. They had both seen that it was thinner than ever, and Aona, on the other side of it, had danced for him, a misty shifting light beyond the queer darkness.

Several times he thought he had almost

seen her outlines through the thinning veil.

He could hear her mind now, tickling his brain with impish thought-fingers.

She must have heard his own thought change, because she asked, "What is it, Son? What's happened?"

"Another ship, I think." Son rose lazily, the green Light from below rippling around him like clear water.

He looked out over his domain, feeling the savage sun-fire and the spatial cold of the shadows touch his naked body with little whips of ecstasy. His face was a boy's

*Between sun and space, a gallant little band fought
to pierce the dread secret of Mercury's orbit—that
the human race might endure!*

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face, handsome and bright-eyed. His fair head burned like a torch in the blinding glare.

The sun made a blazing canopy across half the sky. The rest was open space, velvet dark and boundless, flecked with the little fires of the stars.

Between sun and space lay the wheel, built of space ships that lay side by side, over and under and sometimes through, broken and bent and dead, bound close by the power of the Light.

The Light, lying below Son's naked feet, at the very heart of the wheel, burning green through the packed hulks—the Light that was his bridge to Aona.

Son's blue eyes, unshaded, looked for the wreck. He knew it would be a wreck. Only one ship in the wheel, the one in which his memories began, was whole.

Then he stood quite still, staring, feeling every muscle tense and tighten.

He saw the ship, lying high on the outer rim of the wheel. It was not broken. Tubes burned red at the front end. There was a door opening in the side. Things began to come out of it.

Things shaped like Son, only thick and clumsy, with queer bulbs on their heads.

A strange contracting shiver ran through Son. Since sound and breath had gone, and the effigies that lay in his ship had ceased to move, nothing had stirred on the wheel but Son himself.

In the broken ships there was never anything but scraps of odd substance, scattered as though by some bursting inner force. Son and Aona had talked idly of living beings, but Son hadn't bothered his head about them much.

He was Himself. He had the sun, and space, and Aona. It was sufficient.

Aona said impatiently. "Well, Son?"

"It's a ship," he answered, with his mind. "Only it isn't wrecked. Aona, there are living things coming out of it."

He stood staring at the Veil, and the misty light beyond.

"Aona," his mind whispered. "In my head I'm cold and hot all at once. I want to go and do, but I don't know where or what. What's the matter with me, Aona?"

"It's fear," she told him softly. "I have it, too."

Son could feel it, pulsing from her mind. In all the years of life he had never felt it before.

Now it had him by the throat.

Aona cried. "What if these creatures should harm you, or the Light?"

"You have said that nothing in this universe could harm me now. And—" Son shivered—"no one would do what has to be done to destroy the Light."

"But these creatures—we don't know what knowledge they may have. Son, if anything should happen—"

Son raised his arms to the darkness.

"I don't want you to be afraid, Aona. Tear away the Veil!"

"I can't, darling. You know neither of us can, until the Veil of itself passes behind you."

"How long, Aona?"

She laughed, with an attempt at her old sweet teasing. "How long is 'long' in your world, Son? How long have you lived? How long have we talked? No one knows. Only, the Veil grows thinner every time we meet, every time we talk like this.

"Stay by the Light, Son. Don't let anyone harm it!"

Son's blue eyes narrowed. "I love you," he said quietly. "No one shall harm the Light."

"I'll stay with you," she said. "They won't be able to see—yet."

Son turned and went, across the tumbling plain of dead ships, with Aona's misty light following beyond the blurred and pulsing dark.

THERE were seven of the invaders. They stood in a close knot beside their ship, staring at the green fire of the Light. Three of them began to dance

clumsily. The others placed shapeless hands on each other's shapeless shoulders and shook and pounded.

Son's eyes were as sharp as the spear-points of the stars. He lay behind a steering-jet housing, watching, and he saw with shock that there were faces under the glittering helmets.

Faces very like his own.

There were three round, smooth faces. They belonged to the ones who danced. There was one deeply lined face with bushy eyebrows and a framing straggle of white hair. Then there were two others, which Son sensed to be of different races.

One was round and green and small, with shining eyes the color of space, and a mouth like a thin wound. The other differed from the first three only in subtle points of line and shape, but its face was like a mask beaten out of dark iron, with deep-set, sullen eyes.

The seventh face drove all the others out of Son's mind. It was bronzed and grim and strong, with some driving inner force about it that was like the pulse Son felt beating in space, when he lay on the crest of the wheel watching the sun and the burning stars.

This last man seemed to be the leader. He turned to the others, his mouth moving. Then the mouths of the others moved also. Presently five of the invaders turned. Son thought they were going away again.

But two of them—the white-haired one and the one with the dark, vital face—started together, out across the broken plain of ships. And Son tensed where he lay.

They were heading toward the heart of the wheel, where the glow of the Light danced like the fire-veils of the sun.

Who knew what knowledge, what powers they might have? Son called to Aona, and followed, keeping out of sight, his blue eyes thinned and hard.

They were almost over the Light when Son heard the first human thought-voice, as though the power of the Light brought it

out. It was faint and indistinct. He could catch only fragments.

"... here, inside Mercury's orbit ... heat! ... found it, after five years ..."

That was the bronzed man speaking. Then—

"Yes, thank God! Now if we can—"

Son wished the voices were clearer. There was a terrible, disturbing urgency about them.

The invaders paused where the green light was strongest, at the heart of the wheel.

The mind of the grim, dark man said, "Down there."

He started to lower himself into a crevice between two hulls. And Son, driven by a sudden stab of anger, leaped up.

He came striding across the searing metal, naked and erect and beautiful, his fair head burning in the sunlight.

He flung up one corded arm, and his mind cried out, "No! You can't go down."

The invaders straightened, staring. The face of the bronzed, strong man went white, the lines of it blurring into slackness. The white-haired man swayed on his feet.

"The radiation's getting me, Randsome," he whispered. "I'm having hallucinations."

"No. No, I see it, too." The eyes of the bronzed man burned into Son's. "A man, naked in open space."

He stumbled forward, his gaze fixed on the powerful body outlined against the stars.

Son watched him come, conscious of a curious pulsing excitement. Anger, resentment, fear for the Light, and something else. Something like the first time he had spoken to Aona through the Veil.

The bronzed man stopped before him. His lips moved in that queer way they had. Son heard his mind speaking, faintly.

"What are you?"

"I am Son," he answered simply. "What do you want with the Light?"

Again he heard the faint mind-voice. "You can't understand me, of course. I

don't know what you are, god or demon, but don't try to stop us!"

"But I do understand. You can't go down there."

Ransome turned. "Dick," he said, "Lord only knows what this—this creature is, or what it will do. But we've got to get down there and study this thing. If it tries to stop us, I'll kill it."

Dick nodded his white head. His face was lined and very tired. "Surely nothing will stop us now," he said. "Not now."

"I'll cover you," said Ransome. Dick slid down into the crevice. The bronzed man drew something from his belt and waited.

Son stepped forward, anger and fear cording his muscles.

The dark man said, "I don't want to kill you. I have no right to kill you, because of what you are. But the thing down there is going to be destroyed."

Son stopped, quite still. A great flaming pulse shot through him. And then he gathered himself.

The spring of his corded thighs carried him full over the crack down which the white-haired man had gone. One long arm reached down. The hand closed angrily on smooth glass.

The helmet shattered. Son had a momentary glimpse of a lined, weary face upturned, faded eyes staring in unbelieving horror. Then the flesh of the face split into crimson ribbons, and the body under the space suit altered strangely.

SON got up slowly, feeling strange and unsteady in his thoughts. He hadn't wanted to destroy the man, only to make him come back.

He became aware, then, of Ransome, standing with a metal thing in his hand staring at him with eyes like the savage dying red stars.

"It didn't touch him," Ransome's mind was saying. "A heat ray strong enough to fuse steel, and it didn't touch him. And Dick's dead."

Ransome hurled the gun suddenly into Son's face.

"Do you know what you've done?" his mind shouted. "Dick was a physicist—about the only one with any knowledge that hasn't died of old age. He might have found the way to destroy that thing. Now, if our weapons don't work on it—"

"The effect is accelerating. Every child born since the Cloud is horribly susceptible. There isn't any time any more for anything. There won't be anyone to follow us, because now there's no time to learn."

Ransome stepped close to Son. His head was thrown back, his face a grim hard mask, streaked suddenly by little shining things that ran from those savage eyes.

"You don't know what that means, do you? You don't know how old Dick was with his white hair and his wrinkles. Thirty-six! Or me. I'm nineteen—nineteen. And my life is already half gone."

"All over the Solar System it's like that, because of this hellish thing that came in the Cloud. We've hunted the System over for five years, all of us that could, for a thing that wouldn't react to any test or show on any instrument. And when we found it—"

He stopped, the veins knotted across his forehead, a little muscle twitching in one lean cheek.

Then, very calmly, he said, "Get him, boys."

Son jerked around, but it was too late. The five who had stayed in the ship were all around him. For a long time Son had been conscious only of these two men, and the strange confusion in his mind—a confusion made worse, somehow, by those mysterious crystal drops running from Ransome's eyes. They caught him, somewhere, deep.

Ropes of light metal fell around him. He fought like a Titan in the naked blaze of the sun. But they were experts with their ropes. They caught his wrists and ankles, dividing his power, baffling him with tenuous cords of elastic strength.

Son knew that his mass was still sufficiently in phase to be subject to such laws as gravity and tension. He fought. But presently he was spread-eagled on the burning metal, helpless.

The man with the face like beaten metal and the sullen eyes said, "We were watching from the ship. We thought we must be crazy when we saw this—man standing out here. Then we thought you might need help."

He stopped, staring at Son. "The heat ray didn't touch him."

"No," said Ransome quietly. "That's how he got Dickson."

The one with the queer green face snapped, "Dickson's dead?"

Ransome nodded. "Down in the crack there. We were trying to get down to study the light. He—it didn't want us to go."

The green-faced one said, "My God!"

"Quite. Arun, you and one of the boys guard the ship. Teck, you mount guard here with the other. Greenough, come with me."

One of the round-faced ones stepped forward. His eyes were light blue, oddly empty in spite of their brightness. He looked down at the crevice where Dickson's body was, and his mind said, "I'm afraid. I don't want to go down there. I'm afraid."

"Come on, Greenough," Ransome snapped. His lips started to move again, and stopped abruptly.

Son caught the thought, "Got to hurry. God knows what this radiation will do to us, right on top of it."

"Sir," said Greenough jerkily, "what if there are more like him down there?"

Ransome turned his grim, hard face on the boy. Son felt again that force, the strength that pulses between the stars.

"Well," said Ransome, "what if there are?"

He turned and slid down into the crevice. Greenough closed his pale, scared eyes, licked his lips, and followed.

TECK, the man with the sullen eyes, laughed, a biting mind-sound as hard as his jaw-line. "Hell of a gunnery officer."

Arun said absently, "He's only eleven." His eyes, purple-black and opaque as a dark nebula, swung jerkily from Son to the crevice where Dickson lay, and then back again.

Teck was a big man, as big as Son, but Arun topped him by a foot. He was very slender, moving with a queer rubbery grace.

"What if we can't do it?" he said suddenly. "What if our weapons won't work on it any more than they did on him?"

"Then," answered Teck evenly, "the last generation of mankind will die of old age within fifty years." His sullen gaze roved over Son, over and over, and his mind was whispering to itself.

"Mutation," he said abruptly. "That's it. Complete change of cellular structure, metabolism, brain tissue, everything. Mutation in the living individual. I wonder how long—"

"Look at that green light," whispered Arun. "Remember how it filled the whole sky when we came into the Cloud? Cosmic dust, the scientist said. Temporary effect. But it stayed, when the Cloud went away."

His long thin arms came up in a blind sort of gesture. "We were millions of miles away, then. What will it do to us now?"

Teck studied his hands. "We're not aging, anyway. Concentrated effect is probably different. Feel anything?"

"Deep. Deep inside me. I—"

"Your cellular structure is different from ours, anyway."

Arun swayed slightly, watching the green light pulse up from below. Beads of sweat ran down his face.

"Yes," he whispered. "Different. You know how the Cloud affected us on Tethys. If our life-span were not almost three times as long as your—"

He bent suddenly over Son, and more

of the queer shining things were trickling out of his eyes.

"For five years we've watched our people die, hunting for this thing. Dickson was our only chance. And you, you damned freak—"

He lifted his long arms again, as though to cover his head. "I'll get back to the ship now," he said abruptly, and turned.

Teck hesitated for a heartbeat, scowling at Arun. Then he stepped in front of him, the thing they called a heat gun in his hand.

"Sit down, Arun."

"You heard Ransome's orders." The Tethysman was trembling.

"In the Martian Drylands, where I come from," murmured Teck, "men sometimes get what we call *esht*—desert-fear. They take other men's water and boards, and run away. You're the engineer, Arun, and even without me to do the navigating . . . Sit down, Arun."

The Tethysman sat, a fluid folding of thin length. The two round-faced boys stood by, not moving nor speaking, the fear so strong in their minds that Son could hear it.

He saw and heard all this with a small part of his brain. Most of it was thinking of the Light and the men working their way down to the queer hole where it lay among the tangled ships.

This talk of age and years and dying and humanity meant nothing to him. In all his universe there was only himself, the wheel, the sun, the distant stars, and Aona. There was no day or night, no time.

He was angry and afraid, full of hatred and resentment and a queer tearing at his throat, as though he had lost some vital part of him—the Light. Were they going to take the horrible way of destruction that Aona had told him of? Or did they know another way?

He tensed his corded body against the metal ropes, and his mind cried out "Aona!" as though he were seeing her vanish forever beyond the Veil.

THE Martian said, softly, "He used to be human. I wonder—" He leaned forward suddenly. "Can you hear me?"

Son answered, "Yes." He was beginning to realize something. The mouth movements of these men had something to do with speaking, and their clearest, loudest thoughts came with them.

Teck must have caught the motion of his eyes, for he cried out.

"Yes! But you can't speak, because you don't breathe air. Probably lost both lungs and vocal cords. You must be a telepath. I'll bet that's what you are!"

The Martian's dark-iron mask of a face was eager; his sullen eyes full of little sparks.

"You hear me think, is that it? Nod your head once, if you do."

Son hesitated, studying the men with narrow eyes. If he talked with them, he might find out just how much they knew. He nodded.

Teck was quite still for a moment. Arun sat rigid, staring with eerie, purple eyes at the Light.

"How long have you been here?" asked Teck.

Son shook his head.

"Where did you come from?" Again Son shook his head, and Teck asked, "You know no other place than this?"

Again the negative.

Teck drew a long breath.

"You must have been born here, then. In one of the first ships swept up by the magnetic force of this thing as it passed through the Solar System. Then your ship cannot have been wrecked. Probably the counter-pull of some planet saved it, as our new Elker drive saved us from perishing."

His deep eyes blazed. "Your body was the same as mine, once. How long would it take to change me to a being like you?"

Arun got up suddenly. "I've got to go back to the ship."

Teck's gun hand was steady. "Sit down!"

Arun's thought rose tightly. "But I've got to! Something's wrong—"

Teck's gun thrust forward menacingly. Arun sat down again, slowly. The green light wavered around him, making his face curiously indistinct.

Teck's thought hammered at Son.

"You know what the light is?"

Son hesitated, sending Aona a rapid question.

Her mind said, "No! Don't tell, Son. It might help them destroy it."

He shook his head. "No."

Teck's lips drew back. "You're lying," he said, and then whirled around, his dark hard face taut.

Arun had risen, and the single wild shriek in his mind stabbed Son's brain so that he writhed in his shackles.

The two boys backed off, their faces white and staring. Even Teck drew back a bit, and his gun hand trembled.

Arun was changing. Son watched tensely, forgetting for a moment even his agony of fear for the Light.

The lines of the green, smooth face of the Tethysman blurred and shifted in the green light, like something seen under water.

Strange writhing tremors shook his whole body.

His mind cried out with his moving lips: "Something's happening to me. Oh, God! And all for nothing—"

He staggered forward. His eyes were night-black and luminous, horribly steady in that blurred face, fixed on Son.

Son knew, lying there chained, that he was in deadly peril. Because Arun was on his own plane, though a little past him.

"All for nothing—mankind lost," wailed the thought-voice. "I'm going blind. No. No! I'm seeing—through—"

His scream shivered cold as space along Son's nerve-channels. The tall rubbery form loomed over him, bending closer . . .

ONE of the boys fainted quietly, rolling like an ungainly bundle into a deep shaft between two wrecks. Teck caught his breath.

"I'm not through with him yet," he muttered, and raised his gun.

The glassite helmet melted and ran. The head and the glowing purple eyes beneath it were untouched.

And then no one moved, nor spoke. Arun's head and face quivered, merging imperceptibly into the blurred darkness of the Veil.

Aona cried out suddenly, "He's coming through!" And then, "No! The change was too swift. Too many atoms in transition. He's caught—"

Shivering against Son's mind, like the single wild shaft of a distant comet, came Arun's thought.

"No, not here! Not here—between!"

And then he was gone. His space suit crumpled down, quite empty.

Teck swayed, the dark hardness of his face bleached and rigid. "What did Arun mean—'between'?"

Son lay quite still, hearing Aona sob beyond the Veil. He knew. Aona told him. Between universes—the darkness, the nothingness, the nowhere. He felt the cold dark crawling in his mind.

Teck laughed suddenly, biting and defiant. His deep eyes were fixed on Son, sprawled like a young god in the raw blaze of the sun.

"By the gods," he whispered, "it's worth the risk!"

Greenough came stumbling up out of the crevice.

He looked more like a child than ever. His round face was dazed and bewildered, screwed up strangely. Even to Son, there was something terrible and unholy in that child's shallow-eyed face on a man's strong body.

Teck drew a slow breath. Son felt a dark, iron strength in him, different from the strength of the bronzed Ransome, that

was like the beat of space itself, but great, too.

Great—and dangerous.

"What did you find out?" asked Teck. "Where's Ransome?"

Son's brain burned within him with fear, though he saw that the green Light was still unchanged.

"Down there," said Greenough, and whimpered. He blinked his eyes, moving his head and pawing at his helmet as though to clear it.

"I only looked at it a minute. It was too little and too big all at once, and I was frightened."

Teck caught him by the shoulders and shook him roughly. "Look at what?" he demanded. "What's happened?"

"At the light," said Greenough, in a far-away voice. "We found it inside a ship. We could look right through the metal. I only looked a minute because I was frightened. I was frightened, I was—"

Teck's strong hands snapped his teeth together. "What was it?"

Greenough's shallow eyes wandered to his. "Ransome says it's part of another universe. He's still there, looking. Only—"

Greenough's voice broke in a little hic-cough. "Only he can't see any more."

Son felt a great surge of relief. The Light was safe, so far.

Greenough slipped suddenly from Teck's hands, sitting wide-legged on the hull.

"I'm scared," he said. "I want Mama." Big slow drops ran down his cheeks, and again Son was stirred by something deep and strange.

Teck turned slowly to Son. "He was six years old when the Cloud came. You can build a man's body in eleven years, but not his brain." He was silent, looking down with deep, intense eyes.

HE SPOKE, after a bit, slowly and deliberately.

"So it's part of another universe. Diluted by distance, its radiation speeds

human metabolism, causing swift age. Concentrated, it changes the human organism into an alien metabolism, alien flesh.

"Slim almost made it through, but his peculiar chemical balance destroyed him. You must be in the same transition stage but much slower, being passed by the changing of your basic vibratory rate into another space-time continuum."

Son couldn't hide the sudden flicker in his eyes. He hated this dark Martian suddenly, this man who guessed so much.

"So it's true," said Teck. "Confirmation of the old conception of coexisting universes on different vibratory planes. But how would you know, unless—unless you can talk to that other universe?"

He laughed at the bitter look in Son's blue eyes.

"Afraid, aren't you? That means you have something to hide, or protect." He dropped suddenly to one knee, catching his fingers in Son's fair hair.

"Look at me. I want to watch your eyes. You do know what that light is, and how it can be destroyed. If I could get a body like yours, and still not cross over. Do you feed on the green light, or on the sun?"

The question came so quickly that Son's eyes flicked to the canopy of fire overhead before he could stop them. Teck sat back on his heels with a long, slow sigh.

"That's all I needed," he murmured. "Your friends on the other side evidently can't help you, or you'd be free now." He rose abruptly. "Greenough! You, there, sailor! Help me get this loose hull-section over here."

The two pale, empty-eyed boys rose obediently and helped. The heavy metal plates, uplited by the force of the original crash, were not far from Son. They had only to heat the bottom with cutting torches and bend it.

Son lay, then, in black, utter dark.

"Now then," said Teck. "Back to the ship, both of you."

The boys stumbled off across the broken ships. Son could see them, out in the glare beyond his prison shadow. Teck waited until their backs were well turned.

The beam of his heat gun flickered briefly, twice. Two crumpled shapes fell and were still.

Teck turned, smiling tightly.

"No need to have a whole race of supermen." He inspected the spiderweb of metal ropes that bound Son, and nodded, satisfied.

"When you get hungry enough for energy, you'll tell me how to destroy the light. And then—" His hard dark face was cut deep with triumph, his eyes fierce with dreams.

"After I destroy the light, the aging process will stop. People will start to live again. And I'll be virtually a god, untouchable, impervious."

He laughed, softly and deep within him, rolling Son's head with his foot.

"You wouldn't know what that means, would you? Think it over while I'm down taking care of Ransome!"

He turned and slid down into the crevice.

Son cried out in anguish, "Aona!"

THE Veil, the darkness that was everywhere and nowhere, that was all through the wheel and yet not of it, shimmered and swirled.

"Son! Son, what has happened?"

His mind had been too busy to tell her before. Now he hesitated, thinking of Teck clambering down to kill the man with the strength of the stars in him; thinking of Aran's agony and Greenough's fear and the tired face of the man he had killed; thinking most of all of the strange shining drops that ran from their eyes.

"Aona, what is age?"

"We had it, long ago. The legends hardly remember, except that it was ugly and sad."

"What are years?" He tried to give her the thought as he had taken it from their minds. But the idea was so alien to him,

the time-concept so vague in itself, that he couldn't make himself clear.

She said, "I don't know, Son."

"And Aona—what is death?"

"No one knows that, Son. It's like sleep, only one never awakens. But we live so long before it comes, there's time for everything. And even in the little part of our universe that's left, there are so many worlds to see."

Already, there in the shadow, he was hungry for the sun. He would starve for energy if he couldn't get free. He gathered himself to try. . . .

And then, quite suddenly, it happened. The thing he'd waited all his life for. He looked into the shimmering blur of the Veil and cried, "Aona! Aona! I can see you!"

He surged against his ropes, aflame inside him with a joy like the fire of the sun itself.

The Veil was still there, hiding most of Beyond. But it was closer and thinner. He could see the slim silver shaft of her standing against soft blurred colors, could almost see the luminous brightness of her eyes.

"Oh darling," she cried. "Almost!"

Everything, all memory of the invaders and their alien troubles, left Son's mind. He stared hungrily into the Veil, watching the pale blur of her face steady, become clear.

"You're beautiful," he whispered. "Beautiful as a blue star."

"And you. . . . Oh, Son, go down to the Light. The force is strongest there. The Veil will pass more quickly."

"But I can't. I'm tied." He told her briefly what had happened.

She laughed. "You've changed since then. The ratio has changed. More of your atoms are vibrating in phase with my universe than with yours. From now on the change will be very swift. Try again!"

He tried, pitting his strength against the ropes. Slowly their resistance slackened.

His wrists and ankles slid through them, as though they were heavy smoke.

He rose and shook himself, and looked once more at the wheel and the stars and the blazing sun. Then he turned to Aona, and a pulse of joy rose in him until he thought surely his head would burst.

He plunged downward, toward the Light.

He found that he had no need to clamber through the broken ships. The matter of their metal walls resisted him as water resists a swimmer, no more. He went downward through the green light that grew stronger as he went, until it was like the water at the bottom of a green lake.

Aona followed, running on little white feet across pale blue grass, with a great sweep of sky growing clearer behind her. Her silver draperies whipped-in something she had called a wind. Her eyes were silvery, too, tilted with impish piquancy, and there was a crest of some feathery stuff on her head, burning red-gold like his own sun.

His mind shouted to hers and hers laughed back, and the barrier between their universes was growing thin.

It was almost a shock to Son to see Teck crawling through a doorway in the wrecked saloon of a liner, just above the Light itself.

Ransome crouched on the deck before him, his back turned, quite still.

The Martian's hard lips smiled. He drew his heat gun.

Son stopped, the sheer happiness of the moment shattered. His dark hatred for this man came back, his instinctive loathing of what the fingers of his mind had brushed against in Teck's brain. Also, dimly, it had to do with Ransome.

Hardly realizing what he was doing, he sprang at Teck.

His arm sheared harmlessly through the matter of Teck's helmet and head. Son realized then that he had no more power over the stuff of his universe.

But Teck started and cried out, and his

aim was spoiled. The heat beam flicked across Ransome's shoulder, melting a little hole in the fabric of his space suit.

The Martian's sullen, fiery eyes were wide.

"You've changed," he whispered. "Like Arun. I can see through you."

Then furiously he shouted, "Damn you! Look out!"

He lurched sideways, but he was just too late. A searching tongue of heat ranged across him, across Son and the metal wall behind him, leaving a little molten trail. It rose and fell methodically, weaving a net of death across that whole space.

Teck's space suit collapsed. Son witnessed again, this time with a curious satisfaction, the disruption of an alien organism.

Alien. Yes. And yet. . .

He turned to see Ransome crouched on one knee, holding the shoulder of his suit with one hand and the heat gun—not firing now—in the other.

His eyes were open, but they didn't see. Son knew what had happened. Ransome had looked too long at the Light, and the distances, the planes and angles and curves of it had pulled his sight too far.

Son said, "He's dead."

Ransome nodded. "I heard his mind die. This thing down here—I can hear you, too. I couldn't, up there."

A strange, subtle thrill crept along Son's consciousness. Something in him reached out to that mind. Strong even now, strong as the pulse-beat of space.

"You're not bad," said Ransome. "You just don't understand. I don't suppose you could, although you were human once."

He dropped the gun, as though it didn't matter any more. "I'm going to die, you know. There's a hole in my suit. In a few minutes the air will leak out. But there's no time, is there? And you've forgotten what air is, or why I need it."

The bronzed, grim face smiled, but it was not humorous. "So humanity dies, be-

cause one of its sons has no conception of time."

"SON!" It was Aona calling, peering through the thinning Veil. Ransome lifted his head. "Who's that?"

Son said, "It's Aona. She's waiting for me." His surroundings were getting indistinct.

The Veil was passing.

"Aona. Someone you love. Son—that's what she called you, isn't it? Son, what is this light? Where did it come from?"

The strength of Ransome's mind was bright and terrible. It was like the fire of a dying star.

"It's—Aona, you tell him." Son's thoughts were strangely chaotic.

"It's a part of my universe," she said slowly. There was a quality of stillness in her thought, a subtle forerunner of fear. "Something happened, in one small corner of space, to the electrical tension that holds the fabric of the universe together. There was a release of energy so unthinkably vast—"

Her burning crest drooped as she shivered. "Scraps of our universe were hurled right through the walls of vibration that separate us from other space-time continua. Only a very little bit of ours survived.

"The bit of our universe in yours, vibrating at a different basic rate, makes a sort of bridge between us, by altering atomic speeds. Son has changed almost completely. Only a few of his atoms now vibrate in phase with your universe."

Ransome nodded. "And that alien vibration is destroying us. Can't you take it back?"

Aona shook her glowing head. "We could not possibly generate enough energy to draw it back." Her silvery, tilted eyes went to Son, and the terror in them stabbed him.

"I hear you," said Ransome softly. "Then there is a way."

Aona whispered, "Yes."

All Son's being went out to her. And

yet, some tiny scrap of his mind clung to Ransome's, as though to something he must not lose.

"I don't understand," he said slowly. "Years, age, time—they mean nothing."

"No." Ransome's grim dark head strained back in his helmet. His face was veined and glistening with sweat.

"Think of it this way. You love Aona. She's beautiful—I can hear that in your mind. Suppose that now, while you looked at her, she were to wither and crumple and die—"

He broke off, as though fighting for strength. Not the pulsing strength of his mind, but the power of his body. When his thought came again, it was a whole lot weaker.

"Look at your own body, Son. Think of it, now, growing weak and ugly and bent—"

He staggered up suddenly, his eyes like the last embers of a dying sun, fixed on nothingness.

"You're mankind's only hope, Son. Son. Remember the people who called you that. They were human. Remember. Son—of humanity."

Ransome's suit collapsed with a rush. Son shut his eyes.

"Son," he whispered. "His thought said I—" He couldn't phrase it clearly, but it meant coming from something, being a part of it, as he, already, was part of Aona.

And Aona whispered, "I feel it growing in your mind. Oh, Son—"

He could see the flowers around her feet now, the distant fires of some great sun. A strange tremor shook his body, a shifting and changing.

The Veil was thinner.

"Son, they're not your people any longer. You couldn't even understand."

"No. No, but I could feel." He turned abruptly. "There's something I have to do. Quickly."

He plunged off, rushing through the dissolving matter of his universe. Up, and into the ship he thought of as his, though he

had left it long ago. He hated it, down here away from the sun.

Aona followed him, her feet like little white stars in the grass.

THINGS grew dimmer, more vague. Son had only to wait, to put off thinking until it was too late. But something drove him on.

Presently he stood in the cabin of his ship, looking down at the still effigies. The people who had called him Son not so long ago.

He shivered with something more than the shock of change. These still faces—Dickson's face and Arun's, and Ransome's face.

These still shapes, that had touched him and called him Son and shed queer shining drops from their eyes.

Something caught at him, wrung him so that he cried out.

"I don't want to. Aona, I don't want to. But I must!"

Her thought was a mere tremor across his mind. "I think I knew, when he spoke to you. I try to think, if they were my people, suffering and dying—"

"I don't want to, Aona. But he said—Son of humanity."

Only to postpone, to wait until it was too late. The Veil was so thin. Son beat his hands together, very softly.

Then blindly, he rushed back toward the Light.

Something had got hold of him, was driving him. He knew it was right. But he wanted to fight it, to hold it off until it couldn't hurt him.

And he was afraid.

He stopped in the ship above the Light where Ransome lay dead. He raised his corded arms and cried, "No! I can't. I don't understand!"

He saw Aona watching him on her shining hilltop, not moving or speaking. And slow silver drops rolled from her tilted eyes and down her cheeks.

Then he knew. Then he was calm and steady, and not very much afraid. Because he understood why the bright drops had rolled from the unhappy eyes of the strange men.

He smiled at Aona. He took a long sweeping look at the sun and sky and the blowing grass, and the silver shaft of her standing in the midst of it.

Then he went slowly down toward the Light.

He knew what would happen. Aona had told him. Most of his substance was in the universe now. Part of it was still in his own. But there were atoms in him just changing.

Atoms that were—Between.

Because of the atoms that matched it own, he could penetrate the Light. The atoms in transition would set up a vibration in the Light that had not been in Son because of the balancing pull of two universes.

The vibratory balance of the Light would be destroyed, because Son's universe had no hold on it. It would be pushed back through the wall of that universe, but no back to its own.

A little green roundness that could be held in his hand, that yet was not round at all and that stretched into soaring distance. Color and line and form that melted and flowed and were not.

Son went without stopping, straight into the heart of the Light.

For an instant, or an eternity, he was lost in chaos. He knew nothing—whether he moved or was still, whether he saw the black-green rushing darkness or whether it was only the picture of his own fear.

He didn't fight. He caught only two things to him in his mind—Ransome's strength and Aona, standing on her shining hilltop.

An instant, or an eternity. And then there was stillness, a cessation. Son opened his eyes and looked about—at the space Between.

(Continued from page 59)

The illustration accompanying "The Land of Lost Content" sold that story. And that's the kind of pix I like—different. The story was top reading as far as I am concerned.

But the outstanding story to me was the one I didn't like at all. I started reading it several times and each time quit in disgust. Finally, to be fair to the author, I read it completely through and it still stinks! That story was "Sunken Universe" and that is just where it should have went. It was hardly readable.

Well, that's all I have to say on the subject, except to add, by the way, that I'll keep on reading your mag even with stories like "Sunken Universe" (ugh!) in it.

Cpl. O. Kegan
U. S. Army Hospital
Fort Leonard Wood, Mo.

Dear Editor:

Your November mag was good (as *SS* usually is), especially the long *Missives* and *Missiles* section. Keep it up, but try to leave room for the Ed's comments.

I've been reading stf for a little over two years and rate *SS* at the top of the heap. I'd say your top story was *FLIGHT TO FOREVER* followed by *THE LAND OF LOST CONTENT*, *SUNKEN UNIVERSE*, *THE SOUL MAKERS*, *DOOM SHIP*, and *STAR TAMER* in that order.

The cover was good and the inside illus were fair.

Can you tell me how I can find out about any fan clubs which might be in Eastern Mass.?

Futurilly yours,
Ted Seager,
Marshfield, Mass.

Well, speak up, Massachusetts.

Dear Sir,

I have just received the September 1950 issue of *SSS*, and note that in your reply to Roger Dard's letter, you raised the optimistic question "Any other countries still to be heard from?" Here is another to add to the list of Australia, England, Holland, Germany, and the rest.

There are only a few s. f. fans here in South Africa, but we are every bit as enthusiastic as the more numerous readers in other parts of the world. The situation here is a difficult one as far as s. f. is concerned, and we enthusiasts have to resort to devious means in order to obtain the mags we want, as it is impossible to obtain them through normal channels. Ever since the end of 1948, in order to save dollars, many goods, including all pulp magazines, have been banned from import, and ever since then, s. f. mags. have been practically non-existent. Occasionally one or two get into the shops as back numbers, but these are rare, and for the most part we have to rely on the generosity of U. S. A. and Canadian fans, several of whom

send us magazines regularly, as they are still permitted to enter if they are free gifts, and so do not use up any dollars. There is a hint contained in that last sentence—if any of your readers could spare the time and trouble to send off any mags. that they do not want, they would be doing a really good turn, and earn the grateful thanks of S. A. fans.

Now for a few critical comments on *SSS* (if you can take it?) One of the first s. f. mags. I ever read was the January 1941 issue of *SSS* which I still have in my possession, though somewhat battered with age. I was glad to see its revival, but there are still a few things to be improved upon. I will not say much about your covers because at least they are better than *Bergey's* efforts, though there is still too much of the eternal triangle and buns as yet. But your headings to the stories are awful—they bear no resemblance to the stories they are supposed to describe, and are couched in far too sensational language, which makes them rather obscure. And, in my opinion, "The Big Book of Science-fiction" is far more acceptable than "Read it today, live it tomorrow!" I should hate to live some of the things I read about in s. f. magazines! Now having had the customary gripe, I hasten to add how much I enjoy everything else about *SSS*. Your stories reach a happy medium between melodramatic space opera and heavy psychological or atom doom themes, and the book reviews and readers' column are also fine. So keep up the good work!

Yours sincerely,
(Mrs) Pearl Appleford
73 Kensington Drive,
Durban North,
Durban,
Natal,
South Africa.

To the Editor:

A new light—in the glimmering, glittering person of Chad Oliver—has appeared on the stargazing horizon!

Without the least hesitation I must say that Oliver's story, "The Land of Lost Content," in the October *SUPER SCIENCE* was (and is) one of the best I've ever read. While I'm still uplifted I might add that "The Soul Makers" by Robert Moore Williams was definitely topnotch too. Though I've only dabbled in science-fiction and fantasy reading and just have a general idea of what it's all about, more stories like the ones mentioned might turn me into a full-fledged fan.

Knowing Oliver personally, I feel responsible for telling your readers something about him, seeing that "The Land" is his first, but not last, published story on a professional level.

How well I remember the first day I saw Chad walking across the campus of the University of Texas back in 1946. How neat he looked in his space suit! He pushed a wheelbarrow full of faded pulp magazines and was selling them to wide-eyed students

who couldn't resist those girlie-girlie covers. Those who didn't make purchases or who sneered at still—all of them mysteriously disappeared during the next few days.

But let's get back to Chad's writing! I could write pages and pages on the beauty of his style, how it moves one. I jotted down a few comments heard about "The Land" on the campus when the October *SUPER SCIENCE* hit the newsstands. (You couldn't buy a copy now.) Here's what they said:

Engineering student: "Gad, what a viscosity index."

English professor: "Hmmm. Fine style; but is there a message?"

Western Union boy: "Yes, there is."

L. Sprague de Camp: "Ye gods, Atlantis again!"

Co-ed: "What does it mean? Do you know what it means? I don't know what it means?"

Dean of Women: "That man and woman . . . they weren't married! I'm sure of it."

These are only a few of thousands of ecstatic expostulations which I've been hearing all month. "The Land" is probably the best story ever written, with apologies to the author of the Bible (Henry Kuttner?). Again I must thank *SUPER SCIENCE* for giving us such a wonderful story—and magazine.

With best wishes

Tom Toney,
U. of Texas.

P. S.

And I want you to know that I'd still feel the same way about Chad Oliver's story even if he wasn't my roommate and even if he didn't have a gun in my back.

P. S. No. 2

All joking aside, ed., just how did that thing . . .

Dear Editor:

WOW! What a story was Poul Anderson's *FLIGHT TO FOREVER*. It had everything I wanted in a story plus some. It was my idea of an almost ideal story; mind you I said almost. In a couple of places he could've used a little more explanation. But on the whole it was a great story.

The short stories I rate thus: Merlyn's *SUNKEN UNIVERSE*—very good; next Williams' *THE SOUL MAKERS*—pretty fair; almost even with that is Guth's *DOOM SHIP*; Coppel's *STAR TAMER* was not exciting enough for me; *THE LAND OF LOST CONTENT* was very dry.

Here is my Want list:

Triplanetary: E. E. Smith
First Lensman: E. E. Smith
Ralph 124 C 41: Hugo Gernsback

It's small and I hope sometime in the near future you can fill at least part of it.

Yours faithfully,

Gary Clifton,
Orchard, Nebr.

Dear Editor:

SSS gets such poor circulation up here in the Bronx that it's really an occasion to get

two issues in a row, and this letter is being written in commemoration of that unprecedented feat.

Your old logo and "big book" blurb had long been a source of irritation to me, and I was glad to see both replaced by the new ones. However, the September issues did not meet up to expectations. The Poul Anderson story was, as has been mentioned, a combination of two almost disconnected ideas, and was only fair-to-middling. The other stories were uniformly poor, save for Coppel's excellent "Hall-Life." The reprint, "Beyond Space and Time" was actually laughable.

The November issue, however, was of a much higher quality. Anderson's novel was good, though nowhere near that excellent writer's best. Here are my ratings:

1—"Star Tamer"—Terrible! I don't like most of Coppel's work, but this was superb.

2—"Sunken Universe"—Very good. It reminds me of an early Leinster story, reprinted in *FN* several years ago.

3—"Flight to Forever"

4—"The Land of Lost Content"—Many current s-f stories seem to concern themselves with history running in cycles. This was a good one, tho, and I'd like to see more yarns by Oliver.

5—"The Soul Makers"—This rather smacked of "The Humanoids" don't you think?

6—"Doom Ship"—A horror in every issue, I guess. This story was actually low enough to deserve the Paul illustration.

I definitely approve of your policy of not sticking to one type of story, but don't like the reprints, even though the current one happened to be good.

Oh yes . . . No more Zoromes—please? Pretty please?

Scientifantastically,
Morton D. Paley
1455 Townsend Ave.
New York 52, N. Y.

Dear Ed:

The only reason I'm writing this letter at all is Poul Anderson's story *FLIGHT TO FOREVER* in the November issue of *SSS*. This story, in my opinion (who else's?), is the best time travel story I have ever read wherein a time machine was used. The fact that it was well-written isn't what caused me to like it. It was the planning and construction that got me, the smooth flow of history from century to century, the grandeur of Anderson's portrayal of the Galactic Empire, its rise, decline, and resurrection, and the way he worked on the emotions concerning that Empire. The solution, both to the battle for the rule of the Galaxy and for the end of the story, was excellent. Finlay's silo was perfect, or as near to it as possible.

So Chad Oliver is now an author. Well, well! His style seems a lot like Bradbury's. Even so, he is pretty good. His writing and general plot, that is. There was a story, a novel, in a '42 or '43 issue of a mag which in those days had the back cover also illustrated entitled *THE HOLLOW WORLD* by Don Wilcox. It had practically the same

theme. Oliver's story seemed to be merely a modernized and cut down version. I have an idea he can do better than this and I sincerely hope he will.

Van Dongen on the cover was very good. Very good indeed. As long as we can't have Lawrence keep Van Dongen for your cover artist.

The reprint story this issue, *SUNKEN UNIVERSE*, was a lot better than the last one but I would much prefer all new material in *SS*. Popular has three reprint mags. If this isn't enough bring out another one, but keep *SS* clean.

The new heading on the cover and contents page is nice and looks much better. The old one was too comic bookish.

My goal, get rid of Stuart, please. That mess illustrating Oliver's story was just that, a mess. And if you won't fire Calle at least don't use him so much. I want Lawrence. Or Finlay more often.

The shorts this issue were rather mediocre. Here's a listing in case anyone is interested.

DOOM SHIP. First place. Nice gimmick.

SUNKEN UNIVERSE. Second. Too bad they never translated that history.

STAR TAMER. Third. Coppel slipped on this one.

LAND OF LOST CONTENT. Fourth. Already commented on this.

THE SOUL MAKERS. Fifth. Oh, NO! How about enlarging the *Science Fictioneer*? Add another page.

Sincerely (no kidding),
Fred Stuckey
118 No. Richard St.
Bedford, Pa.

Dear Editor:

Although I am a comparatively new devotee to the field of Science Fiction I can, in

a sense, consider myself a veteran, since I've already read many of the most important anthologies in addition to being, for the past year, a consistent reader of the better SF publications now on the market.

I find *Super Science Stories* up there among the top three SF magazines and improving all the time. If the current rate of improvement can be maintained this coming year, *SS* eventually stands a good chance of becoming the top one. There is just one thing I would like to ask of you. Please stay away from the lurid covers. That has always been a pet peeve of mine with any SF publication. I feel that these "revealing" covers give many intelligent people the wrong impression of Science Fiction, so please do your part and give your magazine the dignity it deserves.

Since I have read every one of the 1950 issues of *SS*, I would like to take this opportunity to rate and discuss some of the better stories. First of all, the March issue, in my opinion, was undeniably the finest of the year. It contained what to my mind was the outstanding *SS* yarn of 1950, Raymond Z. Gallun's beautifully written "A Step Farther Out." Here is sure-fire anthology material, if I'm any judge of good writing. Neil Jones' "World Without Darkness", in the same issue, was not too far behind and the March publication also contained two other mighty fine tales, namely; Van Vogt's "Rogue Ship" and Arthur C. Clarke's "Exile Of The Eons."

In the January issue I particularly liked Raymond Jones' "Outpost Infinity" and Noel Loomis' "The Long Dawn." The latter, incidentally, has already been anthologized in Groff Cooklin's "Big Book of Science Fiction."

Cliff Simak's "Call From Beyond" rang the bell in the May issue and William Bader's "King Of The Stars" drew high honors in

OPINIONS, PLEASE



When you've finished this issue of *Super Science Stories*, won't you let us know what you thought of each story in it? Please number the items in the order of your preference. Use this coupon, or, if you prefer, write us a post card or a letter.

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Danger Dimension.....
High Flight.....
Eternal Earthling.....
The Unfinished.....
Child of the Green Light....

The Address:
Super Science Stories
205 East 42nd St.
New York 17, N. Y.

July. Also ranking high in the July issue of *SS* were MacDonald's "Half Past Eternity" and Sheldon's "A Bit Of Forever." The hammer yarns of the September issue were Neil Jones' "The Mind Masters" (incidentally, I'm really sold on these Zorome tales and would like to see an aspiring SF editor put them together in one bound book) and Poul Anderson's "The Star Beast." The moral of the latter story could easily be "never trust a tiger even when he is an ex-human being." I liked the reprint too, and I'm in favor of continuation of these relics of the past since I've undoubtedly missed many of the good ones. But when you do come up with one of the oldies, make sure it's a worthy one and not just any old yarn you happen to discover lying around in the files.

The November issue, which I've just finished, was one of the better ones of the year. While it didn't contain an outstanding classic like "A Step Farther Out," the November copy of *SS* did harbor a bevy of interesting tales such as Anderson's "Flight To Forever" which somehow reminded me of Wells' "The Time Machine," and William's "The Soul Makers." Oliver's "Land Of Lost Content" and Guth's "Doom Ship" also were worthy reading material. I did not care for the reprint in this issue.

Well, after all these roses and felicitations, I imagine you now expect me to come up with something like, "Why don't you go on a monthly basis?" But I'm not going to. I'm afraid if that happens, *SS* would lose some of its freshness and stellar quality. . . . and I certainly wouldn't want that to occur. Of course, if you could maintain your present high workmanship on a monthly basis, well then. . . .

Yours truly,
Irving Slavin
79 Columbia St.
Bridgeport, Conn.

Dear Editor:

I have completed reading the November issue and would like to compliment Poul Anderson on his superb novel, "Flight To Forever." In my estimation, it was by all odds the best story you have printed since your resumed publication last year. Time travel stories with their eternal paradoxes have always been among my favorites and this one was a classic. I believe this is the first story I have read in which the fourth dimensional time stream curved back on itself in such a manner that by going far enough into the future, a person would eventually return to his original starting time.

According to Einstein, space is finite and curved back on itself because of the gravitational bending of light. Therefore, if time and space are inseparable, this theory seems somewhat plausible. Being only an amateur astronomer, I'll leave it to the physicists to pick this idea apart.

Enough to say I did enjoy the story and would like to see a lot more of Anderson's works soon.

The short stories were not particularly outstanding this time. I would rate them in about this order:

"The Soul Makers"
"The Land of Lost Content"
"Doom Ship"
"Star Tamer"
"Sunken Universe"

As to the question of reprints, my opinion is divided. A story like "Beyond Space and Time" is acceptable, but "Sunken Universe" was terrible. Why you ever chose to reprint this one I'll never know. Surely, you must have something better than this in your back files.

The illustrations in *Super Science* are usually well done and the stories have been improving steadily. Your letter section is among the best, and I always turn to it before I read any of the stories. In summing things up, I would rank your magazine among the top three published today.

Sincerely yours,
Curtis E. Anderson
1000-3rd Avenue Northeast
Minneapolis 13, Minnesota

Dear Sirs:

Just a very short letter to tell you how much I enjoyed reading your story, "The Sunken Universe." I completed a laboratory course in Marine Zoology this summer and naturally this made the story very interesting.

When are you going to have some more stories that deal in the field of biology? Surely not all your readers are majoring in physics and astronomy! Arthur Merlyn must be a biologist. Am I right?

Yours truly,
Tarker Butler
419 West 4th Street
Hattiesburg, Miss.

No, but you're close!

Dear Editor:

It was interesting to see *Sunken Universe* again, after eight years, surrounded by new stories more or less modern in approach. There are some things about it that I'm sure the author wouldn't want repeated, were he writing the story anew now; the most noticeable of these is the "Greetings, O Earthman" base of much of the dialogue, a tone which has since disappeared from all but the worst science-fiction (and for good, I trust.) On the whole, however, the yarn struck me as holding its own among its 1950 competitors—partly because the stories you're using in *Super Science* are essentially old-fashioned in type, and partly, perhaps, because no writer since Merlyn, for some reason, has attempted to use the specialized science of limnology as the background for a story.

Physically, the new presentation left something to be desired. I suppose it is too much to expect a pulp illustrator to illustrate

MISSIVES AND MISSILES

exactly a scene in a story; but Merlyn went out of his way to be specific about his critters, so there isn't much excuse for Callé. If that overlengthy skull-headed fish in the picture is a caddis-worm, then I am a beagle. Why didn't Callé look up the caddis-worm in his encyclopedia, or in an elementary text on biology?

Also, what are the sea-anemone and the jelly-fish doing in the picture? The story takes place in a puddle of fresh water, not in an ocean. And since Lavin is not much bigger than the rotifers and protozoa in the story, either of the above-mentioned sea animals could have devoured him without even noticing him passing through their gullets. All in all, I think it would have been better had you used the Hannes Bok picture which illustrated the story when it was first published. It did not attempt to show any of the animals of the Sunken Universe, but it did show the corolla of a rotifer, accurately drawn, and Lavin in proper size-relationship to it.

Finally; part of the effect of the story, I believe, depends upon the opening and the closing paragraphs in italics. The double-track, however, makes the opening paragraph look like a second blurb for the yarn, and what reader in his right mind bothers with a blurb?

However, I forgive you everything. Why? Because of the magnificent typographical error on page 125, where Lavin is described as methodically spearing "Easters." That must have been one of those Russian Easters Rimsky-Korsakov was talking about in the overture of the same name.

Regards,
James Blish
New York, N. Y.

Dear Editor:

I have just finished reading my first issue of *SSS*. It happens to be the September issue and was purchased by my husband. The only reason I read it was because I was cooped up at home with a cold and was completely out of other reading material. Not that I have anything against science fiction. I like it in book form, but it seems that every time I pick up a science fiction magazine I put it down again with a groan.

This time, however, I had no time to groan. I was too busy reading. This wasn't ordinary pulp paper fiction. This was good stuff. And, of course, what makes it seem good to me is its reasonableness. I don't know whether they are the usual thing but I particularly liked the up-in-the-air type of endings I found in "The Star Beast," "The First," "The Word from the Void,"—but I get awfully bored reading stories like "The Mind Masters." Know why? Because I don't like all the numbers to designate the machine men. I don't know how else you could distinguish them from one another, but I always feel I either have to skip the



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SUPER SCIENCE STORIES

you really a BEM? My best friends are I'll have you know. And please, mystery boy, let's have some comments on the letters—ok?

Well, g'by now,

Just one of those BEM's
 Gregg Calkins
 % C. A. A.
 Panguitch, Utah

P. S. I wrote a poem—wania hear it?—
 (don't answer that)

I've two bits in my jeans,
 But, my oh my,
 \$\$\$ just came out,
 Now I'm two bits shy.

I've two bits in my cords,
 But, my oh my,
 FN just came out,
 Now I'm four bits shy.

I've two bits in my dress pants,
 But, my oh my,
 FFM just came out,
 Now I'm six bits shy.

I've two bits in my jeans,
 But, my oh my,
 AMF just came out,
 Now I'm ONE BUCK shy.

Every other month
 This happens, my friends,
 Where, oh where,
 Can these trends end?
 Moral: I wish they were monthly!!!

You're not perfect, either, Gregg. The word was "disclaimed."

Dear Editor:

An ardent Science and Fantasy reader, I came across your *Super Science* for the first time this week; and it has my enthusiastic support from now on, you can be sure.

I enclose my opinion of your stories, and should like to add that if Mgt. St. Clair would adopt a more literary style she'll be a very effective writer. I appreciate that "Child of Void" is supposedly narrated by a child—but still...

Now for a grouch!!

In the copy I bought on the index-page is noted a story "Impossible", by Ray Bradbury. *This story is not in the Book!!!* Now, I was very disappointed, as Ray is one of my favorite science-fiction authors, and I should like to know why the story is claimed in the index, but does not appear.

Whatever the reason, you have gained another reader, anyway.

Yours sincerely

Robert G. Lander,
 148 Burmalloch Road,
 Balornock, Glasgow, N.
 Scotland.

MISSIVES AND MISSILES

Dear Editor:

This morning your November issue arrived, for the first time you sent it to me, before I saw a copy on the newsstands. Congratulations! In this regard you have been getting progressively better every month, until now you are perfect! However I am not renewing my subscription for the reason that the magazine comes rolled up, and I have a hard job flattening them for my s.d. library. But I will continue to support your magazine with newstand purchases.

T. Engel
149-20th Avenue
Whitestone, N. Y.

Dear Editors:

Just want to send my thanks for publishing a great magazine like *Super Science* Series. Without a doubt it is one of the top Science Fiction magazines on the market today. I've read a few others and I can tell you that the difference between them and *SSS* is startling.

So I want to say thanks for being editors after my own heart and your magazine is unsurpassable as it is now. So please, please don't ever change it.

Sincerely,
S. S.
Boston, Mass.

Dear Editor:

"Flight To Forever" was a natural, "The Soul Makers" and "Sunken Universe"—Hoc Dan! "The Land of Lost Content" and "Doom Ship" were also very good. To the "Star Tamer" goes the booby prize as its casualness and nonchalance contradicts the responsibility, mathematics and vigilance necessary for interstellar travel. All in all, a most satisfactory November issue. Salute!

Bill Vissaris
133 W. 84th Street
New York 24, N. Y.

Thank you one and all. See you in two months.

OPINION TALLY

November, 1950

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-----|
| 1. Flight to Forever | 1.4 |
| 2. The Soul Makers | 3.5 |
| 3. Sunken Universe | 3.6 |
| 4. Land of Lost Content | 3.7 |
| 5. Star Tamer | 3.8 |
| 6. Doom Ship | 4.3 |

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THE LAST DARK

(Continued from page 35)

"What an indelicate simile," Dr. Shrong-tsan said sharply. "You mean an island paradise, perhaps, or a Garden of Eden. Or possibly the crest of Ararat."

"Call yourselves what you like; I wish that I were only there. I haven't time for figures of speech right now." The manager sounded very agitated. "I'm awfully busy. They're here, you know!"

"They're here? Who's there?"

"Nobody bothered to consult me about this damned Nirvana Bomb, of course," the manager wailed. "No! I'm just exiled up here to take the brunt of the invasion. But I could have warned you if I'd been given a chance."

"Invasion? Warned? Whatever are you babbling about?" But the Director had a sensation of dropping into a deep, dark pit, for he thought he knew all too well. He had been expecting and dreading this.

"The invaders are here, you dimwit! They've already landed on the dark side, and are setting up their launching gear for the final lap to Earth. There's nothing we can do about it except sit and twiddle our thumbs now. But you'll be catching it soon as they arrive there, because the radiations don't fade them a bit."

"Who, dammit?" Dr. Shrong-tsan yelled furiously.

"How should I know who? Never saw any of this kind before. A great mass of Outsiders that's come sailing in from the general direction of the nearer planets, though I can't easily describe 'em. I can't even make any sense out of them except they've been waiting for this chance and now you've given it to them. When they saw what had happened they came right on over. And, my friend, if you think your local Outsiders were barbarians, wait until you get a load of these babies!"

The Director was trembling so violently he could not lift his hand to turn off the screen. "Good Lord!" he mumbled. "Won't

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THE UNFINISHED

(Continued from page 85)

we look to Mike Falstaff Bruin—if Mike had brains?"

"Well, a bear has real strength. A bear—"

"Flabby."

"What do you mean, flabby?"

"The way a frog would look to us, maybe. A frog just asking to be skinned alive. I've a hunch we'd grate on a bear in more ways than a bear would grate on us. I've—Eddy, look!

"He's holding a metal cylinder, Eddy. He's coming toward us with a metal cylinder in his paw!"

"It must be a ray-gun. If we don't get them first—"

A dull roar rang out in the bridge room. The clicking stopped.

The old one looked at me.

"Lad," he said, "what's a bear?"

"You've got me!" I said.

"That's what those beasts called us—bears. They said we just looked like men to ourselves!"

I laughed. "If we just look like men we've got a lot of company. There are men like ourselves on every planet capable of supporting life in the Galactic Universe. Any school kid knows that parallel evolution holds good everywhere in space. Why, it's as universal as the second law of thermodynamics."

"You're right. But just supposing—"

"It, admits of no argument. Everywhere in space biological evolution follows the same pattern—unicellular organisms, spiny invertebrates, amphibians, reptiles, primitive Ancestral carnivora distinguished by their massive bodies, short limbs and rudimentary tails, and, finally, man."

"Sure I know, but—"

"Did you ever see a bear? You've done a lot of star-hopping in your time."

"You're right, of course. It's plumb crazy. Maybe we better break up that recording."

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SUPER SCIENCE STORIES

"Why should we do that?"

"I don't know. Just having it around gives me the jitters."

"We're keeping it," I said.

It was utter nonsense any way you looked at it.

On one little planet in the mighty sweep of star fields stretching out in blazing splendor for a million light years a loathsome little biped, fleshy pink, with no fur on its face, had said we just looked like men to ourselves.

"I've been thinking," the old one said. "I've been thinking how a single grain of sand, dropped into a big, intricate machine, can clog the works and send flywheels spinning off in all directions. If that grain is hard and bright enough—"

"You've got to master atomic theory before you can have space flight," I said. "You saw those beasts. Did they look like they had that kind of brightness inside of them?"

I laughed again, because the old one had looked for a minute like the wilted edge of a great rug.

Suddenly he was joining me in my merriment, his rich baritone booming out in the bridge room.

Highest among the virtues of man is that supreme confidence in himself and his destiny which can brook no rival.

I stood up in majestic confidence, watching my image rise with me on the polished metal surface of the navigation dial.

But it was not myself as an individual I saw. In the sturdy chest, covered with a rich matting of white fur, in the long tapering face and deepest eyes that smoldered with undying fires, I saw myself as the apex of a pyramid, the culmination of five million years of evolutionary striving.

How had the poet phrased it?

Eternal man, whose name is blasphemy large on all the starry void . . .

THE SCIENCE FICTIONEER

(Continued from page 37)

that is funny (as in the title yarn), you are going to find yourself laughing out loud; when they want to throw a scare into you (witness "The Twonky" and "Mimsy Were the Borogoves"), you will not escape the sensation of teetering at the edge of a dangerous height. The world the Kuttners create is a nightmare world—nightmare fear, and even nightmare humor—but it is a nightmare you'll want to explore, at a safe distance.

Besides the three stories mentioned, the book contains "What You Need", "The Cure", "Exit the Professor", "See You Later", "Jesting Pilot", "This Is the House", "Rain Check" and "Compliments of the Author", of which all are marvelously competent and "Rain Check" and "Jesting Pilot" are superb. The jacket design, by K. Chester, contains a drawing by Edd Cartier.

"THE HOUSE THAT STOOD STILL"

by A. E. van Vogt. Greenberg; Publishers; \$2.50.

This is the story of a man named Allison Stephens, investigating a mysterious house and its spectacular occupants. The house turns out to be a space-ship; the occupants to be weird, inimical immortals. There is also a great deal of additional material which comes in between, but it is not likely to mean much in synopsis to anyone who has not read the book. For van Vogt's talent for red herrings, false clues and plot threads that lead nowhere shows as clearly here as in any of his better work. The present volume is cast in much the form of a mystery thriller, but with a significant difference: The conventional mystery is a puzzle in which the reader attempts to guess which of a thousand possible happenings the author will use to end the story. Whereas in this, as in other van Vogt, the puzzle is to guess which, if any, the author will leave out.



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